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Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe

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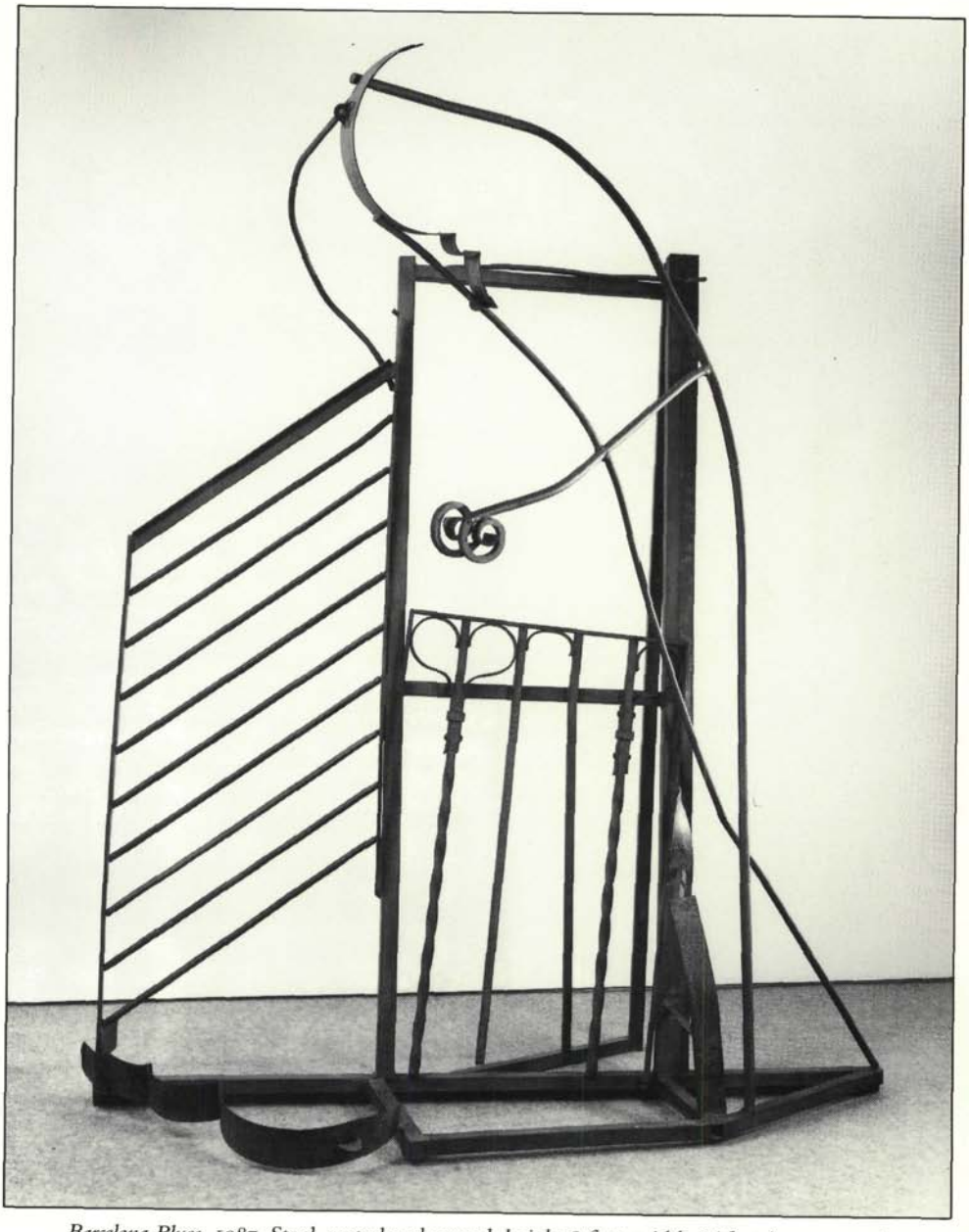

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"Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe," a conference, was held at Rutgers University on April 9, 10, and 11, 1992. The conference was made possible by support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, among others.

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HarperCollins has published **DORIS LESSING**'s newest collection of stories, *The Real Thing*, and will bring out her book about Zimbabwe, *African Laughter*, this fall. . . . **JAKOV LIND**'s first book in English was *Travels to the Enu*; among his other works in English is his novel *The Inspector*. . . . **RICHARD LOURIE** is a writer and translator. His newest book is *Russia Speaks: An Oral History from the Revolution to the Present*. . . . **NORMAN MANEA** left Romania and lived in exile in Berlin before coming to the United States in 1989. A recipient of a MacArthur Foundation award this year, he teaches literature at Bard College. Farrar, Straus & Giroux will bring out his next book of stories, *Compulsory Happiness*, next spring. . . . **ADAM MICHNIK** is now the editor-in-chief of Poland's largest daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*. His *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* appeared in 1985; *The Church and the Left* is forthcoming this fall (U. of Chicago Press). . . . **MIRCEA MIHAIES**, a member of the Romanian Writers' Union Directorate, is editor-in-chief of the cultural weekly *Orizont* and teaches English literature at the Unversity of Timisoara. . . . **CZESLAW MILOSZ**, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1980, is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Among his books is a new essay collection, *Beginning with My Streets* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). . . . **SIDNEY MONAS** is Professor of Slavic Languages and Literature at the University of Texas, Austin. He is working on books about the impact of censorship in Russia and about St. Petersburg. . . . **RICHARD PIPES** is Frank J. Baird, Jr. Professor of History at Harvard University. Knopf published his latest book, *The Russian Revolution*, which will be followed by *Russia Under the New Regime*. . . . **CHARLES RUSSELL** is Associate Provost for Academic Affairs at Rutgers University, Newark. He is author of *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries:The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism* and *The Avant-Garde Today*. . . . **SUSAN SONTAG**'s new novel, *The Volcano Lover*, has been published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux. . . . **VLADIMIR TISMANEANU** is the author of *The Reinvention of Politics: Eastern Europe from Stalin to Havel* (Free Press), among other books. He is Associate Professor of Politics at the University of Maryland and Associate Director of its Center for the Study of Post-Communist Societies. . . . Two collections of **TATYANA TOLSTAYA**'s fiction, *On the Golden Porch* and *Sleepwalker in a Fog* (Knopf) have been published here. . . . **DUBRAVKA UGRESIC** works at the Institute for Literary Theory, University of Zagreb; her novel, *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*, and stories, *In the Jaws of Life*, have been published in England. . . . **OKSANA ZABUZHKO** is a poet and Research Scholar at the Ukrainaian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Kiev. Several volumes of her poetry are in print. **ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI**'s new book of poems, *Two Cities*, will be published in January (Farrar, Straus & Giroux). He teaches creative writing at the University of Houston.

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Intellectuals and Social Change in Central and Eastern Europe

Edith Kurzweil: I did not think of this conference as a victory celebration or a look backwards, except to the extent that I invited participants who are in a position to use their hard-gained experiences, to assess what the future might bring and what may be done to build institutions most likely to preserve individual freedom. As you all know, neither I nor anyone else two-and-a-half years ago, when I started to plan this get-together, had even an inkling of how quickly the world we had known would change, or that some of the then-dissident writers would be governing their respective countries. But I did know that even those of us around *Partisan Review* who had kept in touch with writers behind what used to be called the Iron Curtain (and thus were better informed about European history, economics, and politics than most Americans) were at sea. We all recognized our ignorance when we began to read more and more about the disputes revolving around the rights based on inhabitants' local histories and languages, when we watched area specialists on the *MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour* disagree on nearly everything, from rights based on ethnicity and religion to territorial ones, and when it seemed that conflicting rights increasingly might lead to confrontations and to war. While organizing this conference, for instance, I corresponded with Milovan Djilas, who, after his doctor advised him to relax and not to travel, nevertheless entered into the current conflicts which, as you know, have been multiplying not only in Yugoslavia but in Transylvania, Ukraine, and other places.

The events we have been observing – or ignoring – and pronouncing upon from a safe distance only have reinforced my conviction that writers alone, because they legitimately are allowed to speculate and use their imaginations, manage to catch the nuances that social scientists are taught to disregard and that literary theorists consider grist for their textual mills rather than objective facts.

When my dean, David Hosford, agreed with me that our students needed to know more history and indicated that he would support any event that might get them to read more than outdated, pious textbooks, I began to make concrete plans. These received the enthusiastic support from the Provost's office. Personally, this is the first time I have had to fuse my schizophrenic professional life, to bring together my activities as professor of sociology and as department chair with those of editing *Par-*

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tisan Review. We expect to publish the proceedings of this conference. Segments of the next few days' events will be broadcast live on public radio and will be shown on Suburban Cablevision. Most of all, I want to thank Lynne Cheney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose staff and advisors recognized the educational importance of bringing together writers and academics, Europeans and Americans, who have proven themselves capable of thinking and speaking against the grain, of speaking the unspeakable. Moreover, I'm grateful to our other sponsors: the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, the Soros Foundation, the Joukowsky Family Foundation, Daniel and Joanna Rose, the Trust for Mutual Understanding, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Honors Program, the Special Events Committee of the Rutgers Alumni Federation, the Self-Reliance Federal Credit Union, and the Austrian Institute. And I want to thank Charles Russell, whose tact, together with the Provost's office, helped me overcome some of the obstacles I had to deal with. I welcome them all. But most of all I welcome our distinguished speakers and our audience – many of whom I would have invited as panelists, had we had the time and space. I'm looking forward to a wonderful and enlightening three days.

Now it is my pleasure to introduce the other persons on the platform, who really need no introduction. Right next to me is Dr. Lynne Cheney, a literary scholar and the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Next to her is Dr. Francis Lawrence, a renowned scholar of French literature and the President of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. The next speaker is Dr. Norman Samuels, the Rutgers-Newark Provost. He not only is a trained political scientist and the person who originally hired me, but my boss.

Norman Samuels: It is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Newark campus of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. It's a wonderful bit of irony that we are meeting today in a building which is named for a great artist who was persecuted because he was a Communist, Paul Robeson. Like many cities of Eastern and Central Europe, our host city, Newark, is a hard place. It is also a phoenix risen from the ashes, a city of immigrants, and a cradle of writers and singers. We are delighted, therefore, to welcome poets, scribblers of all kinds, dreamers, thinkers, the only people who truly understand and transcend hard lives. I'm sure that all of you have noticed that people who offer welcomes at events like this often manage to expand their simple official functions into their larger, personal agendas, and I'm afraid that I am no different. As I look at the languages in which many of you write, Russian, English, Polish, German, and so on, I am drawn to remember another language which until World War Two was a fountain of poetry and novels and

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songs in Eastern and Central Europe, and today is generally considered to be dead, like the intellectuals who once spoke it. But it was the language in which I spoke to my father, and I hope that you will indulge my need to see that language kept alive at a conference on Eastern and Central European literature. And so I want to welcome you also in Yiddish:

חשובע געסט. איך וויל אייך אלעמען אפגעבן זייער א הארציגן שלום-
עליכם פון אונדזערע פראפעסארן און תלמידים. מיר האפן אז איר
וועט מיט אונדז שיין פארברענגען די עטלעכע טעג פונעם קאנפערענץ.
איך האף אויך אז איר וועט העלפן מאכן זיכער. אלס שרייבער און
פארשער און לערערס. אז די וועלט וועט נישט פארגעסן וואס ס'איז
דארט געשען מיט מיין פאלק. מיין שפראך און אירע ביכער.

[*My dear guests, I want to convey to you the heartfelt welcome of our own professors and students. We hope that you will have an enjoyable stay with us during this conference. I want to express my own hope that you will help, as writers, scholars, and teachers, to ensure that the world will not forget what happened over there to my people, my language and its books.*]

Thank you. Have a wonderful conference. It's now my great pleasure to introduce to you the President of Rutgers University, my boss, Francis Lawrence.

Francis Lawrence: I have just come back from Poland, where I made one of those whirlwind three-day visits to Warsaw and Krakow that qualify so many Americans as instant experts on Central and Eastern Europe. I cannot say that the universities there struck me as a revolutionary intellectual force for social change. As institutions, they are best equipped for the preservation of intellectual traditions. I participated in the dedication ceremonies for the American Studies program of the University of Warsaw, visited the Media Resources Center that the Rutgers Journalism Institute is establishing in Warsaw to support the creation of free, responsible news media, and gave a keynote address at a conference on local government reforms. I was asked to speak on the leadership role of universities in developing participatory democracy, so, in typically brash American style, I urged the representatives of more than a dozen Central and Eastern European nations to consider the merits of the land-grant model of higher education and its role in the economic and social development of the United States.

Land-grant institutions such as Rutgers transformed American society by pioneering open, democratic access to higher education coupled with aggressive outreach to the people of the state. They originally focused on progress in agriculture but by now have been broadened to include a

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dazzling array of services at the state, national, and international levels. They encompass university-government-industry, high-technology research and development institutes; partnerships with the public schools; training for local governments; and hundreds of other public service activities in areas ranging from health and the environment to economic conditions. Now, after having gone to Poland to relate the American saga of entrepreneurial higher education in the public interest, I would very much like to participate here in these discussions of intellectuals and European social change. However, I must meet with the Rutgers Board of Trustees today. Given the size and brilliance of the group assembled here, I am afraid that you won't miss me. In any event, Edith Kurzweil has assured me that the proceedings will be published in *Partisan Review.* So, whatever I have to miss now, I will be able to read later on. In my role as President of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, however, I want to thank the many people who have helped organize this conference, as well as the participants gathered here. Not the last of the thanks go to Lynne Cheney, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, whose initial grant allowed this event to happen.

Lynne Cheney: One of the great pleasures of my job as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities is seeing projects that we have helped make possible come to fruition. And this conference certainly promises to be one of the finest. Writers and intellectuals, as Edith made very clear in her application, and as Americans are coming more and more to know, played a key role in bringing liberty to the newly free states of Central and Eastern Europe. And I know that I speak for many, many Americans when I say how uplifting we find the example of these scholars to be. For myself, it has always been in personal stories that real understanding happens. I can remember about ten years ago visiting the Soviet Union and meeting a mathematician who was suffering the heavy hand of state oppression. This was a man who was Jewish. He wanted to leave the Soviet Union. He applied for an exit visa and, of course, that was the end of his university career. He was put to work as a furnace tender, and when I visited with him, he didn't mind that so much; he found tending the furnace to be a less troubling way to live than tolerating the kind of intellectual dishonesty that life in the university required of him. So he was stoical about his personal circumstances. But he had a son, whom he described as a a brilliant boy. I know it will not surprise you to learn that because the father had applied for an exit visa, his son was not allowed to attend the university. And when the mathematician spoke of his son, he wept.

I have since heard many stories like this. I've had the opportunity recently to visit with scholars from Hungary and Czechoslovakia. For

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what I suppose you might call personal reasons, I have come to know the defense ministers there fairly well, both of whom are intellectuals, both of whom were deprived for many years of many opportunities to work in the intellectual life they had trained themselves for. The Czech minister spent years and years working as a window-washer. The Hungarian minister was a surveyor. I'm always struck when I hear these stories by the realization that these people did not know how the tale would end. They had no assurance that the revolution would come. They had no assurance that their time as window-washer and surveyor would come to an end and that they would once again have the opportunity to fulfill themselves intellectually.

Last December when I was in Budapest and Prague, I was especially struck by conversations I had with Radim Palous, Director of Charles University. He has two Ph.D.s. The first one was in philosophy, but he said he found it impossible to work as a non-Marxist philosopher, so he got a second Ph.D., this one in chemistry, because, as he explained it to me, there is no Marxist-Leninist view of sulfuric acid. But still, he couldn't restrain himself. He became involved with Charter 77, and he instantly had to leave the university. He was assigned work as a coal stoker, but in private he continued to teach. Students came to his apartment to hear non-Marxist views, to hear unorthodox ways of thinking, and he said to me, I think I shall never in my life have such audiences again. The students weren't there to get degrees or to qualify for professions. They were there because they wanted to learn. Dr. Palous and other academics I visited with in Eastern and Central Europe spoke about how they hoped to learn from academics in this country, about the ways that free societies finance their universities and the ways they govern them. I hope we can be helpful, but I also want to emphasize that intellectuals in this country can learn much from their colleagues in the newly free states.

We have become very cavalier about what we think the end and aim of intellectual life should be. Many in the humanities have thrown over the idea that our goal should be to pursue the truth. Truth is simply an illusion, we hear that again and again. Truth is an illusion created by some in order to give them power over others. And the proper goal of education, we hear again and again, is social transformation, political transformation, and to that end there are things we mustn't let students say, subjects we mustn't let students pursue or pursue ourselves. We should use the classroom as a place to inculcate certain correct attitudes. Political correctness, as this American phenomenon has become known, does not begin to compare with the repression that intellectuals in Eastern and Central Europe have experienced. It is an orthodoxy, but it is not penalizing in the way that intellectuals in the newly free countries

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have suffered penalities. It is on a much smaller scale. All the same, it is an orthodoxy, a set of ideas that inhibit free inquiry. And I think we should look to the experience of our friends in Eastern and Central Europe. I have yet to see, let me say by way of conclusion, an intellectual who, having paid the price of setting himself against Marxist orthodoxy, *doubts* that there is truth or *doubts* that there is objective reality, or who has the *slightest* doubt that pursuing the truth ought to be the end and aim of education. I asked Radim Palous what the role of the university should be in a democracy, and he said, to educate, to draw students from the dark into the light, to move them to an understanding of the truth. I replied, well, you know, on American campuses now, the whole notion of truth is very much under question. There are many who argue it doesn't exist, that only perspectives do, and that our job is to explore perspectives. He would have none of that. He said, to be educated, we must understand the truth, and that means literally to stand under it. It is above us, not we above it. All of us have much to learn from one another, and I'm very pleased that the NEH could help make this conference possible.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you.

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Intellectuals and Writers since the Thirties

Edith Kurzweil: I want to welcome you and to introduce William Phillips, Editor of *Partisan Review*, who will moderate this panel. Joseph Brodsky has not yet arrived, so Czeslaw Milosz has graciously agreed to speak this morning.

William Phillips: The speakers need no introduction. Nearest me is Saul Bellow, Nobel laureate in literature; you've all read his books. Next to him is Ralph Ellison, who is the author of that great novel, *Invisible Man*, and several volumes of essays. At the end is Czeslaw Milosz. He is also a Nobel laureate, an exile from Poland and his native Lithuania. He came to this country in 1960 and now teaches at the University of California.

It is said that writers and intellectuals represent the conscience of mankind, and to some extent we see that this was true in the recent revolutions that were created in Eastern and Central Europe and in the Soviet Union. But what I hope will be brought up here is not only the leading role of writers and intellectuals in the liberation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, but also the fact that so many writers and intellectuals have been wrong so many times.

Saul Bellow: In the middle of the night, I woke my wife, and she kindly agreed to take some notes for me. So I am going to start these proceedings by reading from these jottings, which I hope will set this conversation going. We're here today to talk about differences between the United States and Eastern and Central Europe, about what happens to the higher values of these societies of ours which were set up on a frame of ideas. Ours here in America was, as we all know, a different set of ideas. The Enlightenment philosophers who were the founders of this system wanted to ensure that we would overcome the challenge of scarcity, that we would be provided for as free people, and that the basic needs of mankind would be satisfied here on earth, where the material needs of our species had to be met. That was the first concern of the Enlightenment thinkers, that there would be a social contract, founded on reason, dedicated to the conquest of nature, to the creation of conditions for peace, justice, and order, and that we would forget about the *summum bonum* which was the preoccupation of Aristotle and other

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ancient philosophers. What was important was to avoid a *summum malum*, or civil war, tyranny, poverty, internal chaos. It was felt that it might be better to forget about high ceilings when what we wanted was a solid floor under our feet. The American founders didn't promise a higher life. What they promised us was a society that would offer freedom from starvation, from internecine religious wars, from slavery, from the horrors of the state of nature as Hobbes described it. The founders were thinking of a secure existence, free from the sicknesses and cruelties shown us by the past, protection from the worst that we knew man and nature to be capable of. The founders gave us a picture of man as a limited creature, a creature living in what Marx was later to call "the nightmare of history," filling us with horror, the horror of a nasty, short, and brutish existence, of a war of all against all. They promised us immunity if we would give up our natural rights and consent to more limited rights prescribed by a social contract. I apologize for all of these elementary lessons, but I think it is necessary to say something about them.

As for the higher things, man's ideas as to what he would do in the realm of the spirit, in his relations to the mystery of his being, his religion, his origin, his metaphysics – that was no part of the arrangement. These were to be private concerns, things for men to work out on their own. There was no commitment to these higher things in this democracy based on reason and justice. In considering these matters, it is advisable for us to limit ourselves to the West, where these notions took practical, political form, and for us as Americans it is important to understand the American experience as a prolonged, practical effort to subdue nature, to conquer hunger, disease, and fear, and to provide ourselves with the abundance, peace, balance, and rule of law foreseen by the founders. This is the objective this country has set itself, and it attained a degree of completeness and success probably undreamed of by its founders. America made a serious effort to become the fulfillment of certain perennial dreams of a virtual utopia, where mankind at last found relief from the oppressive conditions which had controlled existence. This country was the realization of the dream of millennium. This is the project that has become associated with capitalism, which Marx described as a stage of human development en route to a fulfillment of even higher human aspirations, a release from greed, exploitation, wars, and darkness of the soul. So when the Revolution of 1917 took place, after years of monstrous war produced by imperialist rivalry, the West also was inspired with hopes of the new era represented by the Russian Revolution.

But after seventy-odd years of indescribable torment and despotism, this hope collapsed and left America and the West as the only successful

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examples of what a society might become: creating more goods for more and more people, presenting us with an unexampled prosperity, comfort, and consumerism, together with the terrible threat of instability, disharmony, and spiritual misery. That's the picture that came to me in the night.

An important part of the struggles of the people of the East against the Communist state was waged not only against the oppression of police power but for the fullness of life, of which they were deprived by Communist dictatorship. The state was supposed to wither away, but it was the individual who discovered that he was withering. And now think of the impassioned chronicles, the poems, stories, and memoirs that have come out of the East associated with, to name only a few, Osip Mandelstam, Alexander Wat, Andrei Siniavsky, Irina Ratushinskaya, Natan Sharansky, and a multitude of activists, writers, and artists manifesting the highest courage, struggling not merely for provisions, bread and shelter, but also for the deepest experience of freedom.

In reading the letters that Vaclav Havel wrote in prison, I came across a reference to literature in the West that stopped me in my tracks. In one of his letters, Havel spoke of one of my books. He had read *Herzog* in jail, and in this letter, he spoke of the difference between words spoken or written in the East as compared with the West. In the East, you were arrested and imprisoned for voicing your opinions, while in the West, you could make as many revolutionary statements as you pleased, and no one would give a damn or pay the slightest attention to you. In the East, it was dictatorship and its jails, its *gulags* that waited for you if you spoke the truth as you saw it. In the West, what you said simply didn't matter. There were no penalties, and therefore, there was no seriousness. Your freedom, therefore, was something of a joke.

But as the Stalinist world collapses, the problems of the West become, in some measure, the problems of the East. The question is whether we need these colossal evils of dictatorship to keep us honest, or whether material prosperity, which now appears to be a universal desire, is a threat to the higher life of mankind.

Czeslaw Milosz: I will improvise this morning. I prepared a paper on dissidence, which I planned to give at a later session of this conference. By dissidence I do not mean dissidence in the East but dissidence in the West. I left Poland too early to study the period of dissidence in the East, but in the West I found myself thrown into a special situation, placed in the special category of "émigre," quite independent of my views or the quality of my writings. Being placed in such a category meant in advance the presupposition that I couldn't do anything valu-

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able. As many writer colleagues of mine conceded, at that time they didn't expect from me anything interesting and valuable because, by definition, I was a reactionary. I speak of this experience not out of bitterness, because I also had many supportive friends as well as help from a number of French and American intellectuals. I am not, after all, a loser.

But the problem is of very large dimensions. We should look at it from the historical perspective, that the Revolution of 1917 really was felt by intellectuals in the West to be a great hope, as Saul Bellow said, and the response to those who tried to tell the truth about the Soviet system since the beginning – because the seeds of later horrors were already there – was to place them in isolation. If we think of the whole period between the two wars, when there was an isolation, a sort of wall that was very difficult for the émigres of that time to penetrate, we should then understand the dimensions of the problem. The great victories of Stalin in the Second World War enhanced enormously the prestige of the Soviet system, and those books in the fifties that tried to speak the truth about, for instance, concentration camps, were ostracized, put aside, as invalid testimony. And really only with Solzhenitsyn's book, *The Gulag Archipelago*, was there a breakthrough, especially where Parisian intellectuals were concerned. So I should say that not only émigres from the East but also some writers in the West were placed by the intellectual establishment in that uncomfortable position. The case of Albert Camus, for instance, represents a significant phenomenon that deserves elucidation and discussion. There was a myth of the Revolution that persisted in the intellectual milieu as, I suspect, a necessary support for the idea of the betterment of man, of progress. Now we are confronted with a situation where there is no myth. How intellectuals are going to cope with this situation is a great unknown. But this new necessity of living without enemies is a subject for large consideration.

Ralph Ellison: I'm not so sure as to how to go about participating in such a discussion. For I, as you can see, am an inside-outsider. However, I suspect that for a variety of reasons this might well be the built-in position, the burden, the fate, that goes with being an intellectual. And especially for writers of fiction, whose attempts at capturing the truth of existence take the form of fashioning lies that entertain while making us think.

Thus as an inside-outsider, one of the questions that Saul's comments raises in my mind has to do with the effect of the Enlightenment on the United States. What Saul said is true, but it seems to me that when the Founding Fathers sought to make the ideals of the Enlightenment mani-

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fest in what they conceived as a new, equalitarian society, quite a few of those who were involved in its establishment were left out of its promises. I'm speaking of slavery and the limited definition assigned to what was, and what wasn't, American. I'm thinking of the role played by slave labor in getting the economic basis of the system established, and of the ethnic, the racial, and the religious ties to the past that added notes of discord to the Founding Fathers' transcendent dream of felicity. Later the nation moved closer to the fulfillment of the material aspects of its dream through the explosion of technology. But then the war of words that has marked our history since the 1860s was suspended by World War One. Which gives substance to Clausewitz's remark that war "is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with the admixture of different means."

Thus it seems to me that European intellectuals might learn how better to deal with the confusion which now exists in their countries because of the break-up of the Soviet Union by paying closer attention to the history of the United States, and to the revisions of earlier accounts that are now being offered. And most especially should they read the fiction of Southern writers, beginning with Warren and Faulkner.

Now if you find this odd coming from an inside-outsider like myself, don't be surprised, for I am also a citizen who believes in the ideals that are shared – at least in the abstract – by all Americans. And if one wants the truth concerning the intermingling of the past with the present, the ideal with the mundane, and the comic with the tragic, one must first realize that there are always myths spun in the name of a nation's ideals which interested parties, individuals and group, project as a means of achieving their goals and maintaining their share of power. Therefore it is necessary to keep one's ear tuned to any contradiction that might arise between their words and their actions, their assertions of abstract ideals and their performance. Yes, and an eye on what they do in the inevitable scrambling for power that marks the political animal.

It is well that European intellectuals remember that historically this country moved from a war of words in which the ideals of the Enlightenment were made flesh, to a Civil War of rifle and cannon that erupted over the question of slavery. A war which led to the Reconstruction and to the ongoing conflict which even today is made manifest in racial friction, rioting, and the burning of segregated neighborhoods.

So now, after the fall of the Soviet Union, and with Europe undergoing a period of reconstruction, I'm led to suggest that European intellectuals might learn useful lessons from this country's history. And especially the wheeling and dealing, the distortions of ideals, and the

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sheer improvisation which is necessary in coping with the social chaos which their own countries are now undergoing.

It would be preposterous for American intellectuals to even *try* to tell you how to think or write, but we *can*, I believe, suggest ways of dealing with the social and psychological complexities that flow from chaotic change. For on some level or the other, chaotic change has marked every phase of our history as a nation.

Thus I believe that we can offer useful suggestions as to how European intellectuals might maintain hope in their national ideals while dealing with such matters as the lack of food and materials that feed their national economies. After all, we went through the Great Depression; during which, thanks to the New Deal, the private foundations for the arts and humanities, and so on, we not only endured, but emerged with a more optimistic view of the future. But during the chaos created by the Depression, the transcendent ideals on which this nation was founded were operating to maintain a balance between our ideals and our reality. And it was the tenacity of our belief in those ideals that allowed the individual citizen to make choices and give creative thrust to his energies.

That of course is the view of an inside-outsider who believes that when you see those who exercise power in the country you love violating its ideals, you're obligated to criticize them and do whatever one can to correct it. And when it works, it works. And when it doesn't, you are obligated to inform your nation's leaders in as many and as eloquent ways as you can, and accept the punishment that goes with telling the truth. For that, after all, is your role in society.

Question: Mr. Milosz, as a high school student twenty-five years ago, I read in a class your book *The Captive Mind*, and it made a very great impression on all of us. It certainly was the first time I was introduced to the problems of intellectuals in the Stalinist empire. In your remarks, you spoke about the isolation you experienced as someone who was, in effect, bringing bad news from the Stalinist empire rather than the myth Western intellectuals wanted to hear. Specifically, what kind of reaction in the West did your book get?

Czeslaw Milosz: At that time I was in Paris, and I was considered something between an insane man and an agent of American imperialism who had been bought by the CIA. So I was caught between those two versions, in the intellectual milieu. The reaction in America to my book was very peculiar. Even Dwight Macdonald wondered in an article why my book had sold three thousand copies.

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William Phillips: That many or that few?

Czeslaw Milosz: He wondered why so few. I should say that this book was for me quite a burden, because I do not consider myself a political writer, and even here, among the persons in this hall, many know me as the author of *The Captive Mind*, when for me it was a sideline; basically I consider myself a poet. For me as a poet that was an obstacle, because my literary colleagues wouldn't believe that a political author could write good poems. It was very hard to create for myself a different persona, while such a book as *The Captive Mind* imprisoned me, as I said, in a special category.

William Phillips: Apparently, then, we didn't do you a service when we published part of it in *Partisan Review* in 1951. It was a disservice.

Question: C. Wright Mills, certainly a man of the left, said of your book that it is one of the great documents of our age. Was that typical of how American intellectuals reacted to the book?

Czeslaw Milosz: Some articles written about my book were very favorable, but they were sociological and political science reviews, and I was pigeonholed in a very narrow category, which I didn't want. Of course, the book has a very peculiar story, because it has been constantly reissued in paperback and has had many readers, but as I said, it is very awkward to be known as the author of such a book, as an author of purely political analyses. I repeat what I said, that I wanted to be *myself* and not a political scientist or a sociologist. Fortunately, I say with irony, when I received tenure at Berkeley, I learned that the responses there to my book made it an obstacle rather than an asset.

William Phillips: Joseph Brodsky has just arrived. Would you speak to us?

Joseph Brodsky: I don't feel qualified to speak as an observer of that tremendous vista of writers and intellectuals since the thirties. The only thing I thought I would speak about is the role of the writers and intellectuals in the foreseeable future or, frankly, even in the present. All I've got to say is that I think if writers and intellectuals have had any role thus far, it is now being substantially diminished. Society is going to get more and more atomized. If Marx was right about one thing, it was the idea that under capitalism human interplay is going to be controlled by

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self-interest, so there is going to be disintegration in the fabric of human interplay. Into that fabric of interplay, obviously, fits the fate of literature. And the role of intellectuals is going to be, as I say, marginal. That's all I have to say. Actually, I can qualify it and add that, especially in the country of my origin, Russia, there is no a large, substantial middle class, a bourgeoisie, which is the prerequisite for a democracy. The entire society has undergone the process of *lumpen*-ization. The same applies to the writers. Obviously, the *lumpen* context is terribly rich as a breeding ground for all sorts of nationalists, populists, or indeed fascist philosophies or concepts of social organization. And if the writer is to play any social role at all, he is to say "Blast you!" to all of this.

Question: In 1992, we've heard mention of replacing the term "Soviet Union." Are you all still comfortable using that term?

Joseph Brodsky: I don't think there's anything wrong with using the old term, in the absence of a better one. For the moment, I myself would call the Soviet Union "the Ruble Zone." But why should we be so picky? I don't see anything wrong with continuing to say "Soviet Union."

Question: Mr. Bellow, you outline two utopias that had been at least partially actualized in the West, but there is a totalitarian utopia in which intellectuals invariably appear to be in power in the beginning and in which they are later marginalized. In the Western societies, there is the perfect example of intellectuals who are not oppressed but nevertheless remain irrelevant. If the entropy of the world is going in this direction, as it appears to be, then I would like to turn your question around and ask you how intellectuals in this community now can remain both honest and relevant.

Saul Bellow: Well, that's a very interesting question. I think we should distinguish between writers and intellectuals. It's an important distinction which deserves to be made, and we should all think very seriously about this. In modern times, we have in a way been in the hands of intellectuals, not necessarily writers. They have formed the major projects of modern times. Intellectuals like Marx, Rousseau, Lenin, and so on down the line, presented us with transformations which we had to live with and which not only dominated our lives but formed our minds, so to speak, so that it required a considerable private individual effort to cast off this framework imposed upon us. I suppose this is unavoidable and in the nature of things in the modern world, since we have entered into a

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state of elevated consciousness. That is to say, everybody has to consider questions, everybody has to think. The mind is suddenly invaded by these new necessities to analyze and to decide. Everybody therefore is involved in some kind of intellectual project. The trouble is that we seem to be incapable of coping with these challenges. The masses of mankind new to consciousness and new to thought are simply incapable of handling the volume and diversity of problems that confront us.

To go back to my first point, it is important to distinguish here between those intellectuals who had a formative influence upon politics and society over the last two or three centuries and those who, like the writers, simply tried to follow subjectively, in the realm of feeling, who tried to ascertain what our states of being were. I've even thought sometimes that any great intellectual benefactor about to release his system upon us should consider what things would look like if his ideas were corrupted, because they always are corrupted. So that if a Rousseau, for instance, had understood how his theories of love, marriage, and the family were going to affect civilization for the next two centuries, what fatal effects they would have, he might have hesitated a little bit before launching these tremendous projects and reforms.

Question: Since we have such a distinguished panel, I would like to ask them something that has always remained unanswered for me. It seems to me that intellectuals were not only carriers of social change but that historically they have also been props of existing society. There was always this *Dichtung und Warheit*, truth and poetry: on the one hand they saw the grand, noble vistas. On the other hand they were capable of justifying or living with something that did not conform to their reality. It was mentioned here, of course, that the United States was one of the widest examples where this ideal of Locke, that all men were created equal, was incorporated into our legal system, yet at the same time we had a system where a man could claim another as his property. And I have also seen this happening even at American universities, where people knew about the Soviet tyranny and persecution, yet at the time when I came to this country, to this university, it was not the thing to say. It was not the thing to say at any university, as a matter of fact.

The question is, does the intellectual – and of course in the Soviet Union, we don't even talk about this – in examining society project his own image as he would wish the society to change or be? Is he willing to overlook the reality for the sake of an ideal he hopes will come about?

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Ralph Ellison: I think that the novelist is stuck with the task of making whatever he can of social reality by reducing it to manageable proportions, and this he does through the forms and techniques of fiction. He might approach the life around him irreverently, and thus seek to convey a sense of its uniqueness and universality through the modes of satire and comedy. He also has the option of examining his characters, their motives and backgrounds in the light of classical tragedy. There are many possible approaches. But if the novelist is an American, he may well choose to approach his material in light of that old, not always recognized, Afro-American attitude toward experience which we know as the blues. Which is a native mode wherein the absurdities that mark our striving to achieve, or to *avoid* achieving, the ideals embodied in the documents which give voice to our political ideals.

That approach is an American form of tragicomedy which allows us to laugh at ourselves and our system's absurdities while affirming the transcendent ideals which form the basis of our strivings. For in the course of pursuing our American ideals such laughter is corrective, in the sense that it allows us to have hope while facing up to our transgressions and follies.

On the other hand, I don't think that books change society in any immediate way. And this despite the fact that during the thirties there were theorists who tried to convince us of such a possibility. But if it worked for them, it didn't for me. For reality is reality, and I was still forced to live in the same sections of our cities and was strictly limited in my choices of such matters as jobs, restaurants, neighborhoods. That such social realities contradicted our American ideals was obvious, but there was nothing to do about it except strive through political action to make our American ideals manifest in our society. Yes, and attempt to make it the substance of art. And don't forget that some fairly good art, especially music, was fashioned from such absurdities. I'll let it go with that.

Czeslaw Milosz: It seems to me that there is a very real opposition between intellectuals and writers, which Saul Bellow mentioned. If we observe the *language* used by intellectuals in the universities, especially those in the English departments, I see a direct contradiction between their aspirations and the aspirations of writers.

William Phillips: Are you sure those are intellectuals you're referring to?

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Joseph Brodsky: I would like to pick up where Mr. Bellow left off, and, I hope, to complete the circle. Basically, I gather that there is some general idea that the intellectuals, or for that matter writers as a sort of spin-off of intellectual life, are responsible up to a certain point for the general mental climate in society, let alone for the blueprints of the social organization – whether they are implemented or left on the board. Well, up to some point of course this is so, but what we have to remember here is a very simple thing, that is, indeed, we owe ninety percent of our political thought today to the gentlemen of the nineteenth century. We can trace it back to Rousseau, who is the enemy number one, of course, because of his very concept of the noble savage, that man is inherently good; that what is bad is the institutions, therefore, "Let's improve the institutions." If we take it to the logical end, we end up with the police state, of course. The Age of Enlightenment was a relatively delicate period of our history, for which we have some sort of nostalgic or almost idyllic longing. It's an idea, but we associate it with Watteau, Boucher, that sort of thing. A nice realm, but rather divorced from the everyday reality of most people.

But the social ideas, the blueprints and the implementation that we use to control our civil institutions today – we owe them more or less to individuals such as Hegel and Marx. The whole point about them is that they were city boys. Their designs for society were based on the urban structures that they knew. In a sense, whenever they talked about society, they were envisioning the city, factories. Hence their emphasis on the predicament of the working class and their designs to improve the life of the working class. But the whole point is that they habitually gave very short shrift to the agricultural sector, the peasants, who actually were the source of life. It's a very strange phenomenon, to want to change society but to approach it by way of its very end, not its very beginning. That is, to start with the proletariat and not with the countryside, which was the source of the society. And even to this day, the processes that are taking place in Central Europe and in Russia follow the same logic, that is, the cart being put before the horse. There still is the emphasis on industry and production. I should think if you wanted to reorganize society, you should start with where the bread comes from before it sits on the table. Beyond that, all those discussions of how to proceed are terribly affected by the fact that people are hungry, to begin with. That's one thing.

There is a distinction between the intellectual and the writer, because by definition the intellectual is a systematic person. He tries to give you a system or antisystem, created as an effort of will. And so it has gone throughout our history. Even the most anarchic intellectuals have tried,

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in a sense, to give a semblance of *order*. Even those intellectuals who dealt with aesthetics were trying to give some kind of social model. By contrast, writers are not that way. At best, they are driven by some lyrical sense of the language they operate with. And I don't think a writer, when he sets out to write a novel, is possessed by the notion of this or that social order which he is going to convey and advertise to you. No, he tells a story, and when you tell a story it already has its own mind, or else you invent it as it unfolds on paper before you, but at any rate it does not come into being according to any political philosophy. What really is mitigating is the writer's sense of language, of harmony. For the moment, that's all I have to say.

Question: I will address my question to Mr. Bellow, since, of all the panelists' work, I am most familiar with his. It may seem a little inappropriate, but it's about the main differences between the American and the long-existing non-Communist European people and how they are influenced by media and special interest groups like businesses. This is somewhat related to what Brodsky and Ellison said, about the projected needs of the people. For example, do writers and the intellectuals project what they want to see, and do businesses project what they want to get? What influence do special interest groups have in Europe and in America, and what are the differences?

Saul Bellow: Well, I'm for all the good things and against all the bad ones. Not to make this trivial, though, judging by what happens in the United States, the forerunner, both the model and the menace of people in other countries, there will be a development in Eastern Europe of popular culture of unexampled magnitude, owing to the triumph of television over almost everything. We live here in America now, and let's not kid ourselves, the prevailing culture is what we see on television. This of course has its sponsors and its profiteers. But even more than that, it's a kind of assembly of the country's mental life. In itself, at the moment, it is not very promising. I don't think that Eastern Europe is going to go any other way, certainly Western Europe hasn't. If you want to think about it, this is the mental misery of the future, at which we ought to be looking.

Question: Do you think the excess of personal products of communication, like computers, will help liberate the people more than the new democratic institutions can?

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Saul Bellow: Well, I think we're in the grip of a technology which is using us. We are in its grip, it is not in ours. It dominates us in mysterious ways. We don't understand even the scientific principles underlying the technology. All we know is that these material miracles surround us and that they increasingly take over our lives. We are more or less in the position of savages who admire and worship these powers but don't understand them. They're too mysterious to be understood, and yet they're man-made. This is a sort of paradox no other generation in history has had to face. It seems to me that this is what drives us, this is what we are serving. Whether we like it or not these are our gods, whom we willingly worship. So I am trying to indicate to you not what the answers are, but how we ought to be thinking about these matters.

Question: One last comment. If we are able to manage our lives more through computers and so on, will this create a greater potential for writers to influence people?

Saul Bellow: The sphere of the writer seems to me to be shrinking. For one thing, there's the illiteracy in the country. Where it's not outright illiteracy, it's functional illiteracy. When you go beyond that, there is a kind of aesthetic illiteracy, corresponding to the latter two types of illiteracy. And in general there is a flagging of interest in these things to which we have devoted our lives to serving. I don't know what is going to result from this. It seems to me that among entertainment, current affairs, sports, and so on, our mental life is being overtaken by all these forces. I don't know what the future holds for us, whether literature will become a sort of elitist activity or not. As for the response of literature to wielders of power, to the magnates who run our corporations, to the bureaucracies, to the educators, and so on, it seems to me that we have to depend upon the power of a sort of deeper humanity to survive all of these new forces.

Ralph Ellison: Shouldn't we also keep in mind that democracy is based on the assumption that the individual is responsible for sorting out the true and the false, the negative from the positive? We are told in the vernacular mode to "be with it," to "dig" what lies beneath all the blarney. No writers, no intellectuals, here or in Europe, are going to relieve the individual citizen of that responsibility. Ultimately, as you judge the element of truth in a work of fiction or in an essay, you are judging reality. The other thing to remember is that democracy provides the individual with the right to reinvent the self, to become that which he

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or she wishes to become. And in doing so the individual moves toward his conception of the ideal. Therefore I think that this concept of freedom will make for a bit of confusion in the newly-freed countries of Europe. It's something to remember because ultimately the health of a democratic society depends upon *you*, the individual. It can't be left to intellectuals any more than it can be left to advertisers. We're all involved and personally responsible.

Question: Mr. Brodsky, I read a newspaper article, the details of which I offer for your refutation or confirmation, whichever is the case, reporting that you were at a town called Struga, in what was formerly Yugoslavia, last summer, at a poetry festival. I would like to know if you could give us a characterization of some of the writing and the poetry coming out of that part of the world.

Joseph Brodsky: I was invited to the Struga festival, which was going to be telecast all over Europe and at which I was to be given an award, but I refused to attend, for one simple reason. I had suggested that the festival be moved from Struga, a relatively out-of-the-way and peaceful place, to Macedonia, Serbia, or Croatia, where the bloodshed was occurring, in order to draw the world's attention to what was going on there. But they didn't move the festival, and so I did not attend. Therefore, I really can't comment on what kind of poetry was read there.

Question: I would like to know whether you as intellectuals feel threatened by the revisionist history that is emerging more and more, and whether you feel you have to take a stand?

Ralph Ellison: Revisionist history in this country has allowed us to face some of the complexities of the past, especially things that occurred during slavery. I grew up in a family that talked about my grandfather having been a minor public official in South Carolina, during the Reconstruction, but I was never able to find anything about that kind of occurrence in some of the best of American histories. Now we are telling some of the complexities of the truth. I've just received a reissued edition of a book by W. E. B. Du Bois which caused a lot of controversy when it was first published in 1935, *Black Reconstruction*, and it will cause a lot of controversy today for those concerned with Du Bois's politics. The information, the data presented in that book is important to all of us because it tells us how the South became the South and how the North became what we are in the North. People pass a statue of Samuel J. Tilden on Riverside Drive every day, and they

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don't know to what an extent their lives were determined by something called the Hayes-Tilden Compromise, but it's American history, and if we don't know it, we are failing to grasp some of our own complexity.

Joseph Brodsky: I guess the term "revisionist history" is nowadays being used more narrowly, since it presumably denotes the interpretation or description of historical events that have taken place since the middle of our century, the causes and mental climate that produced World War Two, and all those, to put it mildly, unpleasantnesses that accompanied it. The main thing is to remember that revisionism is very much the bread of history. Every successive generation applies its own lens to the past; certain things become clearer, and others get dimmer. What is interesting is that we have a far greater understanding of and less argument over, let's say, Greek or Roman antiquity, than we do of what has transpired in our own century and in our own memories. That is not to be dismissed. Of course, I am speaking of revisionist history in its narrow sense.

On the other hand, in the larger terminology, there is a whole class of revisionist historians who can be described as people who tend one way or another to whitewash the record of the Third Reich. That is what we are talking about here, aren't we? The question is whether I would feel obligated to take a stand on that subject; I think I would, if discourse about it were to take place in my presence. Other than that, it is quite difficult to monitor each and every moronic view of what has transpired in history. That is my answer to the question.

William Phillips: I took the question to be specifically directed to the kind of revisionism going on in our universities today, which is trying to undermine what is called Eurocentric history and which, it is claimed, was created by dead, white males.

Saul Bellow: Well, you see, the universities are rather peculiar in this respect; something seems to have gone totally awry in many quarters. Marxism has not done too well in Eastern Europe, but it has taken a new lease on life here. All of a sudden we have all sorts of startling interpretations of history, amounting to a kind of vulgar dismissal under various rubrics that used to be identified with the left, such as the claim that the history of the West is a history of imperialism, colonialism, aggression, exploitation, enslavement. There are accusations that these interpretations have been foisted upon an innocent public in order to continue the hegemony of white males. It fits very well a kind of long-standing tradition of debunking for which this country has always been

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famous, a sort of populist dismissal of everything we have been offered from high places, places a little too high for the taste of the general public. This Marxism-populism has really taken hold in some quarters of the universities and also in the media, to the extent that its interpretations are highly publicized. I think we're in danger of seeing a new dark age come over the mental life of the country. It is a very serious matter.

Question: I am a Rutgers University student. There are many young students who aspire to be writers and who are still in the process of forming their ideas. What advice, through your own experience, would you give to them?

Czeslaw Milosz: In *this* society? I don't know.

Joseph Brodsky: First of all, I don't think one should *aspire* to become a writer – there's too much literature as it is. But seriously, one who aspires to become a writer should bear in mind that the practice of literature, writing, that is, is a tremendously insecure profession. You never gain expertise. For instance, take a pilot, a banker, or a doctor; the more each practices, the greater is the guarantee of the safe landing, the successful transaction, the correct diagnosis. If you are a writer, the more you have done, the less sure you are of yourself. Yet the ambition is always very strong, and if one has set one's eyes on a writing career, one will of course proceed. The only advice that can be given to an individual who wants to become a writer is to be obstinate in the pursuit of this ambition.

William Phillips: Stephen Spender, the British writer, tells the story that when he was a young man and first met T. S. Eliot, Eliot asked him what he wanted to do. When Spender replied that he wanted to be a poet, Eliot answered, "No, no, you don't want to be a poet; you just want to write poetry."

Question: Mr. Bellow, you mentioned Vaclav Havel's *Letters from Prison*. What lessons can we learn from Havel's experiences as a writer and now as an intellectual and a politician?

Saul Bellow: I think that we might get a much more dependable interpretation from Czeslaw Milosz, since he knows both sides of the equation much more intimately than I do.

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Czeslaw Milosz: I would perhaps enlarge the issue, because it seems to me that Havel represents what was once called the intelligentsia, the driving force in the history of the Eastern part of Europe. In the nineteenth century, the Russian intelligentsia conceived of the idea of revolution, and of course Chernyshevsky was the master of Lenin. In a way, the Russian Revolution was first conceived in the minds of the intelligentsia. The whole dissident movement against Communism was really the work of the inheritors of the intelligentsia. This is a big problem now, because, for instance, in Poland, the movement that on an intellectual level contributed to the abolition of Communism consisted of a relatively small group of intellectuals. (One of them, Adam Michnik, is here at this conference.) After the fall of Communism in Poland, the well-intentioned inheritors of the intelligentsia wanted to do what was right for the people, but the people didn't necessarily like what they had in mind. Havel's problem is a certain conflict between himself and the society at large. In this case, I am completely with President Havel and against his detractors. I am certainly very uneasy about the developments in all those countries where various populist tendencies are directed against the intelligentsia.

Question: With the end of the Eastern bloc and the two-bloc system, the end of what we know as Eastern Europe has arrived. What kind of entity do you think will emerge now that there is no longer an Eastern and a Western Europe? What about the concept of Central Europe? Is it also artificial?

Czeslaw Milosz: I am a great admirer of the idea of Central Europe. My friend Joseph Brodsky doesn't agree with me. When I speak of Central Europe, he would say Western Asia – which is a point of view. But there is something that I believe unites those countries of a certain zone between Germany and Russia. They share a very turbulent past but also a common heritage, as for instance in their architecture. Going from Lithuania to Dubrovnik, one perceives a certain connectedness. The idea of Central Europe was in a way an experiment in harmonious existence among those countries, at least among Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; it was a nucleus. But today we are completely lost in particular problems, and we have arrived at a moment when no one knows what direction we will take. I don't know whether the earlier experiment of Central Europe can have any value in the present situation.

Joseph Brodsky: I want to add something. I think the countries that are implied when we say "Eastern Europe" are going to be defined not

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as a nostalgic realm between two empires, not as the leftover of the Habsburg Empire, but by their economic realities, which are rather unpleasant to ponder. The choices they have made have moved them toward becoming client states of Germany. Of course, the option of becoming a client state is preferable to that of becoming a pauper colony. I think that is what is going to transpire and to define the cultural climate. However, something more substantial will happen. There is a new element. The Lutheran element or the Protestant work ethic will gain the upper hand over the Catholic sensibility of these countries. This may even apply to Poland. In order to operate successfully in the economic zone dominated by the deutschmark if you are Catholic, you will pretty soon have to forego some of your precepts; eventually, you will even have to say goodbye to the siesta.

Question: My question is somewhat a change of pace. The economists have a concept called "barriers to entry" which relates to how difficult it is for a new business to enter the marketplace. If we look at American society today, at the individual level, we as writers, perhaps compared to the past, have even more barriers to entry. To be a novelist, you must have published novels, and so on. If you want to be a college professor, you must show your research papers and convince your colleagues that you are an intellectual. In order to work today, you must be computer-literate. Do we have, in fact, today, more invisible people than at the time your novel was written, Mr. Ellison?

Ralph Ellison: Remember, part of the problem for the invisible man was that he was invisible to *himself*, that he didn't grasp his own complexity, and I'm afraid that there are many others today who don't fully grasp our *American* complexity, because we still think in terms of black and white. It's an ongoing factor in American experience. Let's look at the intellectuals who tell us how to live and how to move toward perfection. In this country that spreads from ocean to ocean, all too often intellectuals don't travel, or they don't spend enough time in the various areas so that they might grasp the variations that have been at play for years in the American ideals. They will *tell* me who I am, but they do not bother to *find out* who I really am. I think that one of the roles of intellectuals and writers, when confronted with a great upsurge of change in society, should be to help express such complex definitions of ourselves as individuals.

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Question: Someone spoke of revisionism. I am wondering whether socialist realist culture will ever be revisited; is there any element of truth in it? Is there anything redeeming in it, so that one hundred years from now, someone will see something of value in it?

Joseph Brodsky: I don't think we have to wait that long. I am absolutely sure that the Slavic scholars will coin a term for that period, designating it, let's say, as the period of high classicism; they will have to put a new wrinkle on it, if only for the sake of maintaining their jobs. They will feel compelled to justify the literature of this period in order to keep it from being recognized as garbage. Otherwise, their academic degrees would appear retroactively void.

Question: Mr. Ellison, over the decades, artists and writers of color have often left the United States to go abroad, to be recognized and to grow as intellectuals and artists. With much of the world opening up and some greater intolerance to an extent occurring in the United States, do you see an emerging trend of artists of color again leaving to go abroad? If so, are there hot spots or colonies where this is occurring?

Ralph Ellison: I don't think I can answer that. During my college years, I wanted to go to Paris, because I read books that romanticized the lives of American people in Europe. I couldn't do that, so I hopped a freight train and went briefly to Chicago, which had some mixture for me, an Oklahoman, of strangeness, largeness, and an availability of styles that were being created throughout the country but finding expression there within the city. I don't think it's necessary for a writer to go to Europe just to be recognized. If you have something that is worthwhile, it seems that you can get anything published in this country. I think that many, many of the young editors today are people who were taught by Saul Bellow; even a few who were taught by me are turning up. They are searching for quality. One mark of that quality is what a writer has made out of an honest assessment of reality as he sees it.

Question: My question is directed to Mr. Brodsky and Mr. Milosz. There is a debate going on in Eastern Europe, in particular in the "Ruble Zone," if you will, about whether a reckoning should be held for writers and intellectuals who formally or informally worked for the various secret organizations in these countries. Obviously, there are good arguments both for and against this. There is a lot to be said for intellectual honesty and the potential for national catharsis. On the other hand, there is the danger of possible national witch-hunts, particularly in Russia with

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its grand tradition of witch-hunts. What is your position on this issue? Does the probative value of retribution outweigh its potential prejudicial impact?

Czeslaw Milosz: That epoch of the Communist state has receded very fast into the past. One can even have the impression that it was all a dream. Now we see a completely new situation, maybe demoralizing, in which both former obedient servants of the system and dissidents are in the same bag. I don't think that there is actually much support for vindictiveness. It exists, of course, but on the intellectual level, in the intellectual milieu, literary studies already have appeared in Poland that purport to investigate very "objectively" long poems written in the time of Stalin, and that are being characterized as having been "religious rituals." So I don't think this is a major problem. Of course within the writers' communities, there are certain hatreds. But hatreds are characteristic of writers' communities.

Joseph Brodsky: I haven't thought much about this phenomenon. Obviously, there is a certain appetite for justice. Now that justice is triumphing, one wants to make that triumph complete. However, the trouble with the triumph of justice is that it always arrives with considerable delay – in this case, it would be a delay of a quarter of a century. I simply don't know what should be done to those people. For one thing, I know about the problem of lustration in Czechoslovakia. It leaves me with a very bad taste. But this whole phenomenon harks back to Rousseau's project, to the concept of the noble savage, which became accepted in an intellectual climate that had abandoned the idea of original sin. If one believed in original sin, one was prepared to accept that man is not inherently good; if he is not evil, then at least his negative potential is quite substantial. Once you abandon that notion, then you are open to all sorts of illusions about man, the individual, and the state. If you prosecute or charge such individuals as we are speaking about, those who participated in this so-called evil political system, you have to reincorporate into the framework of the law the notion of orginal sin. And I don't believe that the new emerging democratic societies are prepared to do that.

Question: I am a Rutgers student, and one thing I have learned in my classes is that there are no truths to be held self-evident. In a world where man-made borders are starting to vaporize and more of a world commuinty is emerging, we also have what is going on between Indonesia and East Timor, between Serbia and Croatia. Is there ever

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going to come a time when we will not have to write about these things? Is there ever going to come a time when Mr. Ellison won't have to write about invisible people? Is there any hope?

William Phillips: Who has hope?

Czeslaw Milosz: Sometimes it is difficult to have hope. I signed a petition protesting against the war between Serbia and Croatia; since then I have been receiving from people in America letters supporting in equal proportion both sides. In signing this letter, I had not intended to be on one side or another; rather, it was my intention to protest war itself. But this example illustrates the difficulties we face.

Joseph Brodsky: No, I don't think there is any hope of great magnitude. Francis Bacon once said that hope is a good breakfast but a bad supper. Considering the median age of the members of this panel, I would say that for us it is now past lunchtime. I don't think any of us are going to see a world without conflict. It will be there as long as we, or you, are around.

Question: I would like to come back to the diminishing role of the writer. Don't you feel that it is a need of human nature to communicate, to grasp life in its wholeness, and in all its dimensions? It is out of this need that art was created, that the special breed of artists and writers was created. Perhaps if this need continues to exist, even in this individualistic society, don't you think literature will continue to exist?

Saul Bellow: In my case, the answer is obvious. I myself as well as others do not intend to relinquish our relationship to literature or art, because it is no less than the meaning of life itself. We don't see what we have been doing, I and my colleagues on this panel, being done elsewhere on any considerable scale. I suppose this country could live without art – just as we could live without salt, if the cardiologists had their way – but it isn't very agreeable, and it isn't even real life. The Gospels remind us that if the salt has lost its savor, with what shall we season? The fact is that the real sense of what it means to be born human on this planet Earth will not be reckoned with by people who are not artists. Of course, we can't abandon this responsibility. But in increasing numbers people are turning away from it, and from our culture – I mean that element by which a man or woman shapes himself or herself, creates a distinctly human life that cannot function without painting, without music. At the moment there seems to be a collective turning away from

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the arts. It would be foolish of us not to take note of this, but this does not mean that we are about to capitulate.

Question: Many writers have said that history repeats itself; perhaps that has been true. If history were to repeat itself in the former Soviet Union, what should we expect?

Joseph Brodsky: First of all, history never does repeat itself, for the very simple reason that one of the primary mediums of history is murder: each time a different man dies. I think that you are asking your question more narrowly, though: whether Russia is going to return to its former circumstances. In my view, there is no chance of that whatsoever. The processes that have taken place there are entirely irreversible. That is, you may in some sense have some resurfacing of one or another version of Communist rule, but it will be nothing compared to what transpired in the course of the last seventy years. Russia is going to be a creeping disaster for the next decade or so; the trouble is that geography, at least European geography, doesn't leave history very many options. The bigger the country, the smaller the number of its options. The options are either to be strong or intimidating and wring the necks of its neighbors like dishrags, or to be insignificant, splintered, impoverished. For seventy years in this century, Russia has played the former role; now it is time for it to play the second role. By the year 1995, I think, Russia will be enjoying, if that is the word, this more insignificant role.

Question: I represent several Russian writers in the United States. Mr. Brodsky and Mr. Milosz, do you have any advice to give your colleagues across the Atlantic about working in a market economy?

Czeslaw Milosz: The worry that book publishing would suffer without state subsidies seems to be unconfirmed, since there is a new proliferation of publishing enterprises. Of course, the government subsidies for writers were a considerable factor in the past. There is great trouble, because, for instance, under the Communist system, all writers received pensions. These pensions are still being maintained but are threatened. At the moment, in the East writers and their community are groping for new solutions, because the axiom there had been that culture should be subsidized by the state; it should not be left to private enterprise and private initiative. This is very deeply ingrained, not necessarily because of Communism alone. Take for example the theater in Poland and Czechoslovakia. It was a national institution. It served to protect the national identity, since it was an institution of the language. And so

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were the other branches of culture. They also were sanctified before Communist times. So I expect that in the future there may be some mutuality between private enterprise and cultural institutions.

Joseph Brodsky: I would like to add something. I don't believe that in a market economy, already introduced in the realm of publishing and literature in the former Soviet Union, a writer's creation will be different from what he might create under another economic system. His returns may be smaller, but his creation will be exactly the same – a piece of paper in the typewriter or nowadays on the word processor, or from the fountain pen. Writers will simply have to brace themselves for a less-sweet deal than they had before, that's all. There is no advice to give here, whatsoever. What defines or determines the fate of a writer is the quality of his work.

Question: Have the political changes given rise to a new world audience for writers from the East, now that they are free to publish abroad, free from censorship?

Joseph Brodsky: Demographically, of course this is so. But qualitatively there is no new audience that writers can cater to.

Question: At the risk of pigeonholing you, Mr. Milosz, how do you see your own roles as having changed – do you see yourself as an exile, as an émigre, or as a voluntary migrant? How does the fact that there now is freedom to return to your former country affect you?

Czeslaw Milosz: The right to live wherever one wants has been granted, but I stay in the United States for various personal reasons, and also – I say this half-jokingly – because in Poland I am a Nobel laureate, and that is very restricting. In California, in the Bay area where I live, there are, I think, some sixteen Nobel laureates, so it alleviates the burden. As to my place and my role, they are determined by my poetry. I am a poet of the Polish language, and I have continued to write in Polish. I translate myself into English with help, but basically I have my place in the history and in the present of Polish poetry. My books are usually published there at the same time as they appear here. There is no division for me between literature created there and literature here.

Joseph Brodsky: May I add to this? The essence of the question is about one's attitude toward one's own past. I don't think it changes. You simply can't step twice into the same river, whether you are pre-

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vented from doing so by the state or by the passage of time. You can't return. The country I left twenty years ago now is a different country. Those of different generations are in power now, and I mean not politically but culturally; they are the ones exuding the creative energy and in a sense controlling reality. Simply by being older than they are, I believe I have little in common with them. I would prefer to remember the past as I do rather than attempt to qualify it, but that is an entirely personal preference. What Mr. Milosz said also applies to me, I'm afraid: it would be even more burdensome for me to arrive in Russia with a halo around me, to tolerate those sentiments of adulation that are so taxing. Therefore, it is far better to maintain by necessity or default some distance from your home and from your own past. Although at first it seems that there always is a gravity pulling you back to your home, it may eventually seem that the force pulling you is one that extends outward rather than backward. For this reason, to say the least, to return to or to review the past seems problematic.

Question: Do you think there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary exile?

Joseph Brodsky: Presumably, it is a moral pickle for some people, but not for me. To begin with, I don't really know whether a writer can in good conscience speak of exile being voluntary or involuntary, because for the majority of us émigre writers, it was a physical transition at least from worse to better. Moreover, if you think of all the people in the world who have had to migrate, this effectively takes the boutonniere out of the writer's lapel for having done so. He loses a distinctiveness in the greater picture.

Question: It was said before that the shift away from art and high culture could be said to be the result of a free and more prosperous society in which people have many choices. I think this accounts for some of the hostility that many intellectuals have shown toward bourgeois society. How do we combine allegiance to the values of a free society with the notion that people should listen to writers and pay attention to culture?

Saul Bellow: This is a very vexing question, and I really don't know how to answer it. It involves an historical movement of enormous scope, namely the transformation of a whole nation, or civilization really, into a new mode in which the individual is overwhelmed by the novelty and power of certain compelling instruments that drive one to live out the destiny of its time on a material level. We are in a way, all of us, the

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servants of these transforming elements, whether we like it or not. But that does not mean that humankind is infinitely plastic and has no more going for it than the present time and its forces. One has to step aside from historical speculations of that kind to look inside the soul and to find what it is that is truly of significance. This alone can remove you from the field of forces. I think you all know what I'm talking about, this new technology, this universal change to new modes of existence. This does not mean that the modes of existence we represent have no more place; it is only a question of how many souls will be able to resist the distraction of the immense range of interests and projects that a society like ours instills in us. It is true for me, and it must be true for others, too, that our resistance cannot be eradicated. An example from the Stalinist era would be the writer Osip Mandelstam. Everything was against him in Soviet society, politics, and all the rest. Yet he was loyal to what I have been talking about. And I often think of a country as numerous as ours in population, that if only one tenth of the population thinks this way, you already have a considerable public that you can count on. They don't even know that they are a public. The power of the soul that is in them requires them to step outside this millennia of desires, this utopia. You can hardly wonder that people are absorbed by this, by its sheer power. Whether it eliminates these other forms of individual cultivation – I think the answer has to be "no," because it is as real and vivid to us as it ever was. Even though it may not command the attention of tens of billions of people, that is not an indictment of its reality or its importance.

Question: In light of what you just said, would you say that the fact that we do have this free society with so many choices is a positive thing?

Saul Bellow: There are two ways of seeing it. One is that it is a new barbarism and that it will crush everything. The other is to bank on the disposition of the people to whom culture is of the first importance. What the outcome will be, as a prophet, I am at a loss to predict.

Joseph Brodsky: There is one more thing, I suppose, that one can bank on in this society: all of the material objects the individual can accumulate are of a kind; they share a common denominator, in that they cannot provide individual fulfillment. I think people accumulate expecting social fulfillment, but in the end tangible objects never do provide anyone with a sense of fulfillment. Then, an individual looks elsewhere. This could be interpreted as evidence of the possession of a soul.

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Question: As each of you reflects on the intellectual and artistic life, what is your feeling about the religious and spiritual health of your respective nations? Do you think of it as part of the solution or part of the problem?

Czeslaw Milosz: Your question is so large that I don't think I would be able to talk about it sensibly. Personally, I believe we are living through a period of enormous erosion of the religious imagination, and for me the phenomena of contemporary poetry, such as the work of Samuel Beckett or Philip Larkin, are crucial. Theirs is a hopeless vision of the human condition. It prevails, not always as openly as in, for example, Larkin's work, but we are confronted with those issues, and the work of the community of writers and artists does reach beyond its own sphere to affect the population at large. Perhaps Poland is an exception, but I am actually very skeptical about some aspects of the fate of religion in Poland. To start a discussion of this dimension, I feel, we would have to go to the core of our predicament in the world today. It would be the beginning of an enormous debate.

Ralph Ellison: Without going into the spiritual aspects of religion, I would note the decline in attendance within the black church. There has been a loss of a certain discipline. The lore of the older generations is being lost to the younger generations, and thus they lose a sense of the complexity of historical experiences. For instance, you can hear ads on television or the radio in which young, white, Northern girls are screaming in the accents of Negroes; it's pervading our culture, but we don't know where it actually originated. In other words, we are losing our folklore and the discipline, religious and otherwise, that existed through those churches. They were one of the institutions, during and after slavery, that were tolerated. We could get together there and exchange experiences, and so on.

Joseph Brodsky: I can speak here only for Russia. I think historically and at present the Church played a rather destructive role in the life of society. Since Russia is an Orthodox country, the ecclesiastic doctrine does not divorce the head of the state from itself. So even the most enterprising churchmen in the end would insist on the principle of obedience. In a sense, the Russian Church is responsible for the creation of the spiritual climate of obedience. It also has been responsible for the idea that whatever takes place is the manifestation of a divine providence that is testing us; therefore, it is essential that the individual should endure this trial; upon this depends how his soul scores afterwards. The Russian

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Church never has been the source of any qualitatively new spiritual ideas. No encyclicals on this subject were even issued by the Church. This is because the Church's purpose on this earth has been to survive. It has displayed the same deportment as the Jesuitical order, for example, in the Catholic Church. At the moment, the Russian Church is still contributing to the diffusion of the social argument. That is why I think after a certain point the Church is a hindrance. On the other hand, that remarkable other hand, you have the climate of the Church giving a universal answer to life. This may result in a more profound social contract than could emerge elsewhere. I don't think it has taken place thus far. Right now the Church revels in being allowed to exist. It almost is operating with some vengeance in the context of society. That is as clear as I can be without getting into metaphysics.

Czeslaw Milosz: For me personally, it is very important to give a spiritual dimension to poetry. I am definitely against such poets as Philip Larkin. I appreciate the poetry of Joseph Brodsky, because it has that spiritual dimension. If we take American poetry, the spiritual dimension mostly comes from Buddhism, not from Christianity. This is a very peculiar phenomenon. In Poland, there is a split between the intellectual branch of Catholicism and Catholicism at large, which is oriented in a populist, rightist direction.

Question: I come from Croatia. If the people of Central and Eastern Europe now are extremely apathetic, could they be otherwise influenced by the work of writers?

Joseph Brodsky: If it is true that the people of Eastern Europe are in the grip of apathy, what can writers do about it?

Czeslaw Milosz: Apathy is a social phenomenon, as is skepticism about political institutions. It touches large segments of a population. In my opinion, those, for instance, who participated in the Polish elections, a relatively small percentage, were intellectually aware. In this sense, there is some hope.

Joseph Brodsky: First of all, I don't agree with the premise that most of the people in Eastern Europe are in the grip of apathy, simply because they have been *acting* – frequently in some erroneous manner, but nevertheless acting. Secondly, if it were true, it is my experience that apathy is a transitory and not a permanent stage. Nor do I believe that skepticism is the final destination of the individual. One may pride oneself on being

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skeptical and even nihilistic, but that is not the answer. These are inadequate reactions to the great puzzle of existence. Thirdly, to put the poet or writer against society is the wrong way to put it, because it assumes that the writer's status is contingent on the status of society. Had it been so, we would have had a far smaller – or greater – amount of literature. Art is not dependent on society or even on the reality of the world. You may survive Hiroshima or a concentration camp and produce not one line of literature, whereas a one-night stand could give birth to an immortal lyric. So it is a completely different kind of logic, and to inquire of a writer how he should behave under certain social circumstances is rather silly. In essence, the writer owes the society absolutely zilch. And another thing, a writer psychologically is a member of a greater body, of civilization, than that merely of his own society. So it is not for society to ask what a writer should do for it. Rather, it is for society to meet him halfway, so to speak. Don't ask a writer how he thinks he should behave. At best, society for a writer is an audience. It is either present or it is absent.

Question: When Eastern European writers are published in a magazine like *Partisan Review*, Mr. Phillips, what kind of a reception are they likely to get?

William Phillips: A reception that is, to the extent that we reach a certain number of readers, and to the extent that we have a certain amount of influence, good. Actually, it's worked both ways. We've received a lot of information from so-called Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union that the magazine had a certain underground reputation there. I think it's been favorable and positive. Sometimes the reputation exceeded the readership, but that's a different question.

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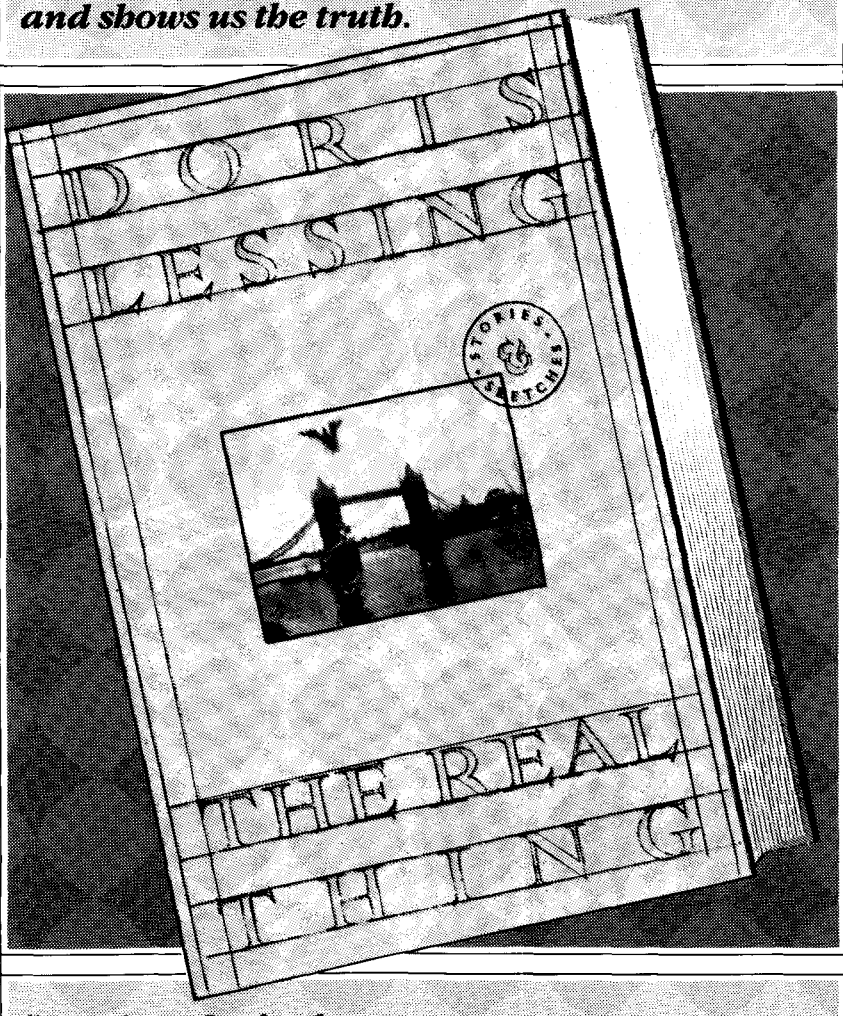

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Common Historical Roots

Susan Sontag: Welcome to this afternoon's session. Our first speaker will be George Konrad.

George Konrad: When speaking of Central and Eastern Europe, we must remember that the different nations reached their transition to nationhood in very different periods of their histories. There are those that were already kingdoms in medieval times and somehow now find themselves thousand-year-old nations. These were the Polish, the Czech, and the Hungarian kingdoms. Then there were other nations, some of them latecomers. Among these are the Serbs. The Croats are a bit special because they played a very strong autonomous role in the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. Romania came at the end of the nineteenth century, as did Bulgaria; and there are two nations, Slovakia and Croatia, that became independent sovereign states in a rather bad period – during the Second World War and with the help of the Third Reich. Under what auspices a nation was created is quite important, because when some people perceive what the situation is now, they prefer to forget these last forty years; beyond those years, they look back to history. With history, they justify and legitimate themselves; they build their traditions, their collective mind, their common consciousness and historical past. Therefore, historical reflections are extremely important in the construction of the actual mentality of these nations. Of course, there are also many historical mythologies. That is why some politicians speak in the name of "a three-thousand-year-old history." History is always used as a political tool to justify one national political ambition or another, some seeming reality, some facade of reality, some ideological ambitions. Thus we have nationally politicized historiography, as well as historicized politics.

It is quite characteristic, and even funny, that there are so many history teachers among the new politicians, deputies, and ministers. Somehow they cannot restrain themselves from giving historical lectures to their nations from their positions in high office. Therefore, history becomes one of the tools of the struggle. A kind of restoration-minded, mythology- and symbol-searching process is taking place in the collective minds of these countries. Some of it derives from the fact that it's hard to find a point of departure from the years of Communism, because the entire system, the so-called *ancien régime* as a whole, is being blamed. But unfortunately, all these nations and people partook of that system and somehow found their *modus vivendi* in it, and it would be a very superficial description of the situation to say that once everyone suffered and

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now everyone is happy; that is not the case. So it is difficult to turn to the future from a single, fixed point of departure.

Moreover, there is the sociological aspect of the problem. We are dealing with nations that have a very small middle class, and even this modest middle class is heavily dependent on the state. The largest sector of this middle class is educated, consisting of the state bureaucracy, the intellectuals, and the academics in state institutions. The man of the state, the man owned by the state, the nationalized man – this basic personality – was also very characteristic of our life during the Communist period. For the man of the state and for the people, the mentality and the culture of the state was their own culture. And if we go a bit further back into the past, we also have to realize that the biggest proportion of jobs at the turn of the century were state jobs, even in the most developed area of the Habsburg Empire. Half of the engineers, for example, worked for the state, and in Russia industrialization was strongly and heavily subsidized by state investments.

This means that the strongest carriers of the national idea were those who worked in the bureaucracy and those intellectuals in whose work was somehow invested the vitality of the national languages. It is rather amusing that the most extreme nationalists in the new states, in the very new nations, are – I am a bit ashamed to say – the teachers of literature, of the national literatures. But of course the bureaucracy tends to create more state jobs and new state offices in order to enhance its power, so whenever a new state is on the horizon, many people hope to find lucrative positions within it. Therefore, it is in the interest of many people within the society to create a national state. Moreover, during the entire Communist period, people got used to conforming, to being obedient to the state; they looked to it for instructions and solutions, for help and subventions, for messianic gestures from the government offices. Therefore, it will be quite a long process before arriving at an independent, so-called civil society with a financially and economically independent bourgeoisie. You can become an academic in a couple of years, but you can't become a bourgeois in a real sense – with a culture of freedom, of rights, and of beauty – so swiftly. So it may take a whole generation before we have a stronger middle class in these countries. Democracy is built on a large middle class: if it is lacking, then democracy will be a bit shaky, and the state bureaucracy will tend towards a kind of authoritarian, half-bureaucratic, half-democratic system. It will have a strong tendency to perpetuate a kind of system within government; this tendency requires an ideology. The most plausible ideology is nationalism.

I wouldn't confuse the notion of "the nation" with that of nationalism, because the concept of nations is an inevitable phenomenon; it

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originated in a process of development which started, perhaps, in Northwestern Europe with the emergence of the Netherlands and Great Britain, grew slowly with the more centralized and absolutist kingdoms like France, and later, in the nineteenth century, with Germany and Italy. It's a process that has gone further in the twentieth century; perhaps the particular formation of Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union was a very special instance in this process. Of course, the Russian nation was already strong enough in the seventeenth or eighteenth century to create a big, independent national state. It was easy then to move eastward and southward, to conquer all of Siberia with about two thousand Cossacks. In fact, the world's largest continental colonial power was created without great sacrifices, and like all colonial powers it also had a kind of peacemaking role in its territories, such as the Caucasus, where one hundred and twenty different languages were spoken and the men were accustomed to carrying guns.

The non-Communist powers, from Kerensky to Kornilov in 1917, were not able to keep the Empire together. But with their specific ideological and organizational tools, the Bolsheviks were able to do so. The decolonization of Russia has begun only very recently. Ukraine was ready for independence in 1917, at the end of the First World War, as were Armenia, Georgia, and the Baltic countries. Yet all these societies were put in the refrigerator, as later on were the East Central European ones outside the periphery of the imperium. But the colonizers, the Russians themselves, were as unhappy as the colonized. And everyone had the feeling that the reason for their unhappiness was the Other: the colonized believed it was because the Russians had occupied their countries, and the Russians believed it was because they had to occupy those countries. There are jokes in the Ottoman Empire about the tourist who asks the Hungarian, "Why are you so poor?" The Hungarian answers, "Because the Turks were here." And this question is asked throughout the Balkans. Finally the tourist arrives in Turkey and asks, "Why are you so poor?" "It's because we were forced to go into Hungary."

Now everything is coming out of the refrigerator. It is a proven fact that nothing can remain buried – no aspirations; no intellectual, ideological, religious, familial, or political traditions; no class divisions. Everything emerges from the soil, from underground, and all kinds of national tendencies erupt. Those who analyze the situation and speak of a kind of national renaissance are right in an analytical sense: it is a time of emergence for new nations. Yet that brings us to the problem of the criteria for "nation." As I mentioned, historical proofs and justifications are brought to light by way of a kind of political archaeology, which finds or invents some monuments, artifacts, symbols, to "prove" that it

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had always been there. There is also another, more negative, genre of this art of archaeology: it digs out everything and demolishes those gravestones and walls that bear symbols unfriendly to itself.

We now know what people in Eastern Europe want. They are no longer forced to be afraid of military or police actions, at least not immediately. This is a big relief, and as a result all kinds of underground national tendencies are being expressed. The political structure of Europe did manage to survive the dissolution of the old regimes, at least until the last two years, during which the Soviet Union collapsed. In this period of change, the acceptable criteria for stability seemed to be the provision of rearranged housing, the sanctification of political and international borders, and a kind of refrigeration of the status quo. This is probably still the highest priority among the politicians who care about stability; they would consider the moving of national borders to be extremely dangerous gestures.

Because the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia have fallen apart, the sense that you can't touch borders, that they are a kind of sacred cow, has become very questionable. Inevitably, there are people who now say, "If they have the right of self-determination, why shouldn't we have it too?" Size cannot really be definitively given as a reason for denial. The Slovenians wanted to become independent, and they were criticized: "You are too small a nation; you can't really be autonomous; you will be too dependent; you can't stand on your own." "Look at Luxembourg," the Slovenians answered. When the Serbs in Croatia saw that the Croatians could be independent, they wanted their own territories to be independent as well. And if the Moldavians have an independent statehood, why should a Russian who lives there not also want an independent statehood? Now these problems have become a mess.

The national state did not appear as such a strong historical force in the nineteenth century, because it was not possible to create clear-cut national states. The ethnic mixture of the territories – big, intermingled islands of very different national groups – made it almost impossible to draw clear ethnic border lines.There were some attempts to do so, and even from America came some experiments. There are some anecdotes about this, not very happy ones. For instance, when President Roosevelt went to Yalta, he brought a sketch, prepared by the American State Department, proposing where certain national borders should be drawn, which the Hungarians had found acceptable. But when Roosevelt got to Yalta, he was sleepy, and he forgot to take the sketch out of his luggage. So its proposed border lines were not followed, and as a result millions of people remained, as a minority, in a situation they didn't like.

Now, many nations are full of resentments. There are those that would like to become independent, to have a national state. They say

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that it is their thousand-year-old dream to finally achieve statehood. Thus they are resentful. Then there are those that are independent, but whose state has other national minorities within it which don't identify with the majority nation. This ideology of the national state also subscribes to the subcriterion that it must be homogeneous. *La nacion homogène* is a nightmare, a successful illusion originally created in France to make the French the ruling nation in France. At the time of the Revolution, maybe thirty-five percent of the population of France spoke French. The illusion created a possible means of homogenization by which a successful, developing bourgeoisie and a strongly centralized bureaucracy could be achieved.

In Eastern-Central Europe, where there is, rather than a tradition of statehood, a very powerful map of ethnic reality, that was not the case. Thus there are, for instance, cases that have become jokes: Mr. Konrad, who lives, let's say, in Uzgorod, is asked, "What is your country?" "Oh," he says, "I was born in Hungary, in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Later on I lived in Czechoslovakia, and I was a patriot for Czechoslovakia. Then in '39, I had to be a good Hungarian patriot. From '45 on, I had to be a good Soviet patriot. Now I have to be a good Ukrainian patriot." Too many "belongings" make people a little crazy, because they need some sort of sustained, collective social identity. They need to know who they are. In the minds of the old and mature and therefore advanced nations, such as France and England, to say "who I am" is much easier, not only because there is a given national definition which does not need so many emphases and ideologies, but also because social identity is much clearer and more traditionally entrenched. In the democratic, capitalist societies, for instance, it is understood what is meant by a "middle-class person."

In the post-Communist societies, the social position of a family is so disturbed and has been so disrupted that there is little possibility of continuing family traditions, of the chance to be proud of the grandfathers and the fathers at the same time. As a result, there is a kind of confusion and uncertainty about the social, national, collective, religious ego. This ego is looking for something more solid. But since the entire socialist camp and the brotherhood of the socialists have gone over and disappeared, what remains is a kind of more or less moderate, nationalist anti-Communism. And we shouldn't forget that the most offensive nationalist anti-Communism was the Third Reich and the Fascist alliance. It is not easy to avoid such reminiscing, even in the new countries of the former Soviet Union. Perhaps the contemporary collaborators will not have as moral an image as their predecessors did. On the other hand, these new nations don't know where they belong. COMECON has disappeared. The Warsaw Pact has disappeared. In their illu-

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sion, the new nations erroneously reasoned, "Europe will arm us. They will like us; they will help us."

People who were accustomed to getting everything from above still hope that Yeltsin will solve their problems, "because he is better than Gorbachev was." Western public opinion has been so simple-minded that the media discussed whether Yeltsin or Gorbachev was now the stronger – these are episodic and inessential questions. In the meantime, the structure and life of these nations has remained the same, with very few autonomous initiatives in society, and with even stronger dependence on the state. The state switched from a Communist vocabulary to a nationalist vocabulary, because that is easy; you don't have to learn too much. All the former Communists who were the top state and Party bureaucrats in the less developed countries tried to switch to the nationalist vocabulary, and they are now strongly against their own former federations; the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia. Maybe they will all fall apart. Because these federations somehow were linked to the idea of a Communist centralism, their people cannot forget their bad memories, their ambitions for independence. If they fall apart, the dismantling process will go further.

I am absolutely sure that those smaller national entities also will define themselves as political communities and as nations with aspirations to territorial statehood. So the question is whether there is any force inside or outside the individual territories strong enough to create a transnational authority. At the moment, I don't see any signs of that. There is a pervasive state of idea-lessness, a lack of thinking, in all the political communities. Perhaps there will be a miracle. At the moment, I am less scared for the Central European belt. Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary will have a stronger type of integration because they may be accepted by the European Community. I don't know what will happen in the former Soviet Union. The Americans and even the Germans hope that maybe Japan can do something for Russia, and the Japanese, of course, say that they hope the same of the Americans and the Germans. We see that history has not yet ended.

Susan Sontag: Before we go on, I'd like to put an issue on the table for discussion after we hear our speakers. George Konrad has just described the conditions of the inevitability of the replacement of Communist ideology by nationalist ideology. I find his argument altogether convincing. But isn't it also true that here in the United States and in the other so-called developed nations, nationalism is becoming an anachronistic concept, however much our populations are susceptible to these ancient sentiments? The most important reason for this is economic. The principal instruments of capitalist production have become transna-

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tional. Isn't it likely that nationalist furors will prove to be just as old-fashioned and as maladaptive in the would-be capitalist countries of Central and Eastern Europe? This suggests, I think, one direction in which Konrad's remarks might be developed in our discussion.

Our next speaker is Blaga Dimitrova.

Blaga Dimitrova: Ladies and gentlemen, I see in the program that my talk has been titled, "Moving Away from Communism." My remarks are not precisely on that subject, but I do think that every discussion we have had at this conference leads away from Communism. (If I dared to read my essay in my totalitarian English, I'm sure that it would take me a long time and a great effort to move away from Communism, or maybe I would not succeed at all. That is why I have asked Marianna Katzarova to read it for me.) I have given my remarks the title, "The Triumph of Sisyphus."

"Il faut imaginer Sisyphus heureux," wrote Albert Camus in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Today, fate has thrown a new challenge in Sisyphus's way, perhaps greater than any other challenge he faced. For dozens of years, as long as centuries, the dissident Sisyphus kept pushing his big stone uphill in a desperate effort, short of breath but not short of hope. Treacherous serpents spied on him and hissed from a distance, careful not to be squashed by the boulder when it rolled downhill. Wasps stung him fiercely; hawks drew ominous loops over his head; jackals lay in wait for him at night when he dropped to the ground, overpowered by fatigue; those gossips, the bluejays, tried to smear his name before the sovereigns above. All the while, the destitute people below urged him on from their hiding places in the caves: "Well done, Sisyphus! A little more! Hold on, Sisyphus! Don't let us down! Don't give up! We are behind you, firmly behind you!"

Perhaps Sisyphus was hearing only his own thoughts, but those voices of encouragement gave him courage anyway, and he strove on, never lifting his hands from the heavy stone he himself had chosen. The stone was a fragment of petrified history, a conglomerate of humiliation, strife, and anguish; tears, blood, and sweat turned into marble, a fossilized national fate. His palms were bruised by the rough surface of the rock; his veins bulged and strained; the light of dedication shone in his eyes. Whenever he stopped to take a deep breath, Sisyphus would carve proclamations in the stone using his chipped nails and bruised fingers. Then again he would muster all his strength and push the stone uphill, step by step, inch by inch. And as he ascended, panting in the rhythm of his breathless aspiration, he would compose verses, dramas, satires that were a sweet comfort to him. Cut off as he was from the company of others, he never for a moment lost his sense of identity. His image was

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reflected in the stone's facets. Illuminated and inspired by his own perseverance, it could not be defaced.

Suddenly, as he was scrambling desperately up the arid scree, his bare feet sliding down, yet again facing the danger of being crushed by his burden, Sisyphus scrambled to the very top of the hill, in a last effort. Startled, disbelieving his eyes, he looked around. Defying the old myth, the stone stood there instead of rolling back down the precipice. Now Sisyphus heard the voice of his own soul: Did you succeed? Have you really done it? Now you realize that you never thought you would. Why, though, aren't you triumphant? Were you resigned to the fate of pushing that stone uphill to your last breath? Is it that you actually enjoyed the bruising roughness of the stone that made your hands bleed? Did you feel yourself to be only an extension of the stone? Why are you smiling yet so sad? Now you are faced with an even more impossible challenge: to balance the heavy rock on the ridge of the hill. What can you do? All your life you have defied power, and now you are holding supreme power in your hands. Can you run away, just now, and leave the stone so precariously balanced? Will you be able to fix it there without breaking it asunder and ruining it, this shaky, rugged granite overhanging the abyss?

Here, think of the absurdity of human life! A Sisyphean victory: a bare peak, devastated by the former almighty rulers, barrenness all around. The stone up there turns into a pedestal. Once, Sisyphus generated movement, a striving upwards, albeit doomed to collapse. Today, that same Sisyphus must create stability. The serpents crawl out of the rocks and begin to fawn on him. The jackals stalk around the victor, bowing to him while waiting for him to stumble. The old rhinoceroses "criticize him constructively." The bluejays mock him, giggling under their tails, "Ha-ha! What a hairdo! Look at his jagged nails! Look at his humped back! He looks like a rock formation himself! A megalith!" Cockroaches creep out of every crack and hole. The wasps sting him "from a position of principle." Dark clouds gather, bolts of lightning cross swords and whet them on the stone. Sisyphus stands in the open like a lightning rod under their blades, straining his muscles and propping up the rock lest it roll back to the bottom of the precipice. The cowards who used to hide in cracks and crevices while Sisyphus pushed the stone uphill, who vilified him for "destabilizing the pyramid," now thump their chests proudly and complacently tap the stone on its rough flank.

"We helped you scramble up so high, mythical stone! You couldn't have done it without us!"

"Why didn't I see you?" Sisyphus asks, confused.

"We stood firmly behind you, Sisyphus. We were your sound back, your eyes and ears! Bent under the burden, preoccupied with pushing the

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stone uphill, dizzy with fatigue, you could not possible raise your eyes and look farther ahead. We were your brain trust, we are your spokespeople! We and no one else! Now we shall rally close around the granite colossus and be your sturdy support. Prop up the stone with both hands and never let it go, while we will sing praises to you!"

Amid the sublime wilderness and the passionate voices, Sisyphus sometimes feels nostalgic for the noble torment of pushing the stone, his cheek glued to the rough surface, his sweat as if streaming from the pores of the animated stone. It was a futile and hopeless effort, but there was also a gratifying sense of fulfilled duty! Today, muddy waters lash the stone, birds smear it with their droppings, and the wise owls withdraw, so as not to soil themselves. Sisyphus is alone. No one helps him, but they distract him with all sorts of petty problems. Worn down with fatigue, he perches on the stone, as on a throne. Suddenly, the boulder gives way and tilts backward, poised over the edge of the cliff. An unknown abyss gapes below. Sisyphus sets his back against the boulder, barely managing to steady it. What lies in that precipice beyond, which is like the other side of the moon? Who would have thought that the real uphill task, rife with dangers, would be there, at the summit? In his long sleepless nights, Sisyphus talks to the stone, "Can you hear me? Answer my question! Where did I go wrong? People used to love and trust me. Now they call me "power-hungry" and shun me. I used to have a dream, and now I have a great burden. What shall I do? Why are you silent?"

"It's absurd!" echoes the stone that is not a stone, but a piece of petrified national fate.

How can you breathe life into that stone, Sisyphus? Now you weight it on the scales of anxiety and measure it on the crucifix of thought. Where are you, wise owls? The world has become a thousand-headed dragon. Fix your tie! Smile! There is nowhere to hide. Microphones snake toward you, intent on sucking you in, word by word. If you steal a moment for introspection, probing for that poem pushing up inside you, you might miss a crucial turn of events. Leave that poem alone, it's fatal! You have been transformed into a living caryatid. If you lift your head from the stone and follow where the orphan laughter is crying and calling to you, and if you look from a distance at this theater of the absurd, at these burlesques of power – oh, then, beware of the rock that will crush you with compunctions, roll over you and send you down into the abyss! Instead of poetry, you are faced with appeals and grievances, stacks of documents and compromising dossiers, memoranda, urgent decisions. Congratulations! Keep smiling! From the bottom of the hill, the sky had looked small to Sisyphus, like the gorge of a well full of bright azure which made him thirsty. As he had scrambled uphill,

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his thirst had grown and fueled his aspiration. Once more, he would push the stone with fresh hope and energy. Now, from the vantage of the bare ridge, the blue sky withdrew and dilated into an endless firmament. The blue appeared paler in the bright noon sun. Sisyphus's lips were dry from the endless speeches and interviews he had to give.

Where is your strength, Sisyphus? The world seems very different from the top, doesn't it – complex, descending precipitously to deep gorges, an intricate maze of roads, an insatiable beast with a mouth gaping like an abyss, waiting to swallow up all your illusions. Down there, the colors merge into a ragged blanket pulled every which way. Once, your difficult path led straight uphill; now there is no way up except in your dreams. Yet you no longer are a dreamer but a doer. So cling to the rock bearing the mark of your fingers as its wrinkles are imprinted on your palms. Hold firmly onto it, gnash your teeth, grind the angry, stony words between them, grind them into fine sand and swallow it! A taste of desert! Keep smiling, outdoing yourself, and then again. If you fail to hold the rock up at the peak, you yourself will collapse into the abyss, banishing forever the white swallow, harbinger of hope, from those barren slopes. In your naive and stubborn belief, your wild urge to challenge and transform fate, you could be cast down to the very bottom, stoned to death.

Watch out, Sisyphus, lest you yourself turn into marble, a monument. Look around you. Don't you see, down there in the town squares, countless granite monuments, bizarre cairns, petrified violence? You are dizzy at this great height, and everything looks upside down. The peak seems a muddy bottom and the bottom a bright summit. The stone is the only landmark by which you can get your bearings; wherever the inanimate stone is, so are you. You are cursed to stay always with it, to breathe life into it. You have no right to withdraw and look into your soul. Meanwhile, so many subjects for biting satires, Shakespearean dramas, and verses carved out of suffering well up and choke you. Stifle them! Remember the stone! You are bound to mold, warm, and revive every dent and pore of its surface. Is not the daily fight with deadly inertia, with the hardness and cold of the stone on the ridge, enough to give sense to your human life? Once down at the base of the pyramid, now at its summit, you, Sisyphus, cannot be unhappy.

Susan Sontag: Thank you very much. Tatyana Tolstaya.

Tatyana Tolstaya: As far as I can see, this conference, as are many other such gatherings that involve Eastern Europeans, is not one of intellectuals but of emotionals. That is quite understandable. Intellectually, we know it is better to be unified, but emotionally it is wiser to

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stay apart, since those we most passionately disagree with and have the most mixed feelings about are our neighbors and our brothers. Intellectually, you may conclude, as many people do, that it is much better for the culture of the world, and perhaps for its economy and politics as well, if things exist in codependence. And there have been periods in history when people have wanted to stay together, yet then they have drawn apart from each other culturally. Today, no one wants to stay together. The history of mankind itself is one of our constantly changing our opinions. When you tire of your visiting relatives, you are relieved when they leave. Later, you want to call them back, just to chat. But there is no chatting if you speak different languages, and especially if you insist on forgetting the language you once knew.

Thus, understanding the emotions of writers and intellectuals, the representatives of each Eastern European country I have met here, I must say that I know very well that offending someone's national emotions is one of the most unpleasant things. And while no one wants to do that, at the same time each of us wants also that others not offend our own national emotions. That is quite normal. We are not mean; we wish each other well. But there is a problem, and we are trying to find our way out of it. The problem lies with what we call "the former Soviet Union." It is not, in fact, "former." It is still there in all possible senses. And as such it creates problems for each of the nations that inhabit it. Even if you think of that Ruble Zone, as Brodsky called it, as now being "Russia plus the republics," and even if these republics still stay together and use the same ruble, those who live in that space will try to define each of their nations by its difference from all the other possible nations that inhabit that country. For some countries that are ethnically uniform, it is a much less complicated situation than for Russia. For example, the Estonians have a problem with Russians and other foreigners living in their territory, but they know who the Estonians are; it is obvious to them that there are Estonians and then there are the others. It is easy to distinguish the two. The attitude toward these others is that they are of course foreigners and perhaps even former enemies. You decide how far back to look in order to find the first enemy. But with Russia, the problem can never be solved, because there is no such nation that exists made up of "Russians."

There is a Russian language; it's questionable, however, where the Russian language starts and where it ends. Russia is huge. In a linguistic sense, the distance is much greater from north to south than from west to east, though you can drive from north to south in three days. To drive from the west to the east, ten days would not be enough time, especially if you consider that there are no roads there. You just never come to an end. And it's a strange phenomenon; there are more linguis-

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tic zones, more dialects, from north to south, than there are in either eastbound or westbound directions. There are so many Russian-speaking nations, peoples, dialects, groups, and tribes or former tribes living around Moscow that people sometimes do not understand each other even when they are discussing simple things connected to the lexicon of the household or of common plants, for instance. One of my jobs as a student in the university was to try to draw a linguistic map of the names for flowers, berries, and mushrooms in northern Russian dialects. Unfortunately, the catalogue of words for these objects was too small and scattered for the job to be completed. There was very little catalogued about these innocent berries and flowers, in contrast to the huge catalogue of Lenin's words that were found. (Those students who had chosen Lenin for their linguistic project were rewarded, but those who did not were rewarded in a different sense. We stayed free from Lenin's lexicon.) Nevertheless, it was clear even from our small catalogue that there are many areas, just little strips of land, that have different words for the same things. And I can easily imagine that people from the far north, like Arkhangelsk, a big city in northern Russia, do not understand those who live in the far south, like Stavropol for example, where Gorbachev comes from.

There were of course other reasons aside from language why we did not understand Gorbachev, and it really had more to do with his intellect than with his lexicon. Yet there are dialects that become languages if they are isolated from the mainstream, and when they return to the mainstream they stop being dialects. It depends on isolation, on foreign influence, on whether a particular dialect or language happens to have a great writer. A great writer, especially the first great writer, the founder of a literary language, appears in each culture from time to time, and one of the features of his greatness is that he establishes a certain standard which from time to time becomes a literary norm. The legitimacy of that norm can never be subject to question, because everyone accepts it as such, just as you cannot discuss whether, for example, "inch" is better than "centimeter": it's just "inch," and that's it. You may be angry with the "inch," but it's here to stay. For example, it was Pushkin who established such a strong literary norm that we all write in Pushkin's language, even though people in the villages don't speak that language. They have other syntaxes; we don't understand each other.

The old Russian town of Novgorod, in the north, was in the tenth and eleventh centuries a republic. It was like a Greek polis and existed quite autonomously, with a democratic system in which people voted and elected their representatives. Relatively Westernized, Novgorod was prosperous and traded with what at the time were Sweden and Germany. Its people read and wrote books; they wore leather boots.

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And they spoke Russian, of course. Eventually Novgorod was destroyed by Ivan the Terrible, and its people joined the Moscow kingdom or czardom, Moscow-Russia. In the following centuries, it no longer existed as an independent entity. In 1950, the treasures of that very Novgorod were excavated and brought back to the world. The letters and boots of Novgorod were well preserved. Yet it was discovered that from somewhere around the twelfth century on, there were no letters, scraps of books, or leather boots. There were only primitive materials, such as bark shoes that would have lasted three or four days and then would have had to be replaced. The people had forgotten how to read and write, how to make books and leather boots. They had lost their independence and been returned to the mainstream of Russian statehood and the Russian language.

While studying everything the people of Novgorod had written, the scholars of the excavation concluded that the Novgorod dialect could be designated a special Slavic language. It had enough crucial, basic features to qualify as such. The same thing is true for any Slavic language; they all come from the same root. The same thing, for example, happened with the Ukrainian or Belorussian languages – and no language is better than another one. They are all equal. Cultures, in contrast, are not equal; they create more than others or less than others. No one is responsible for that except history, life, events, God, and other forces which interfere in our lives.

You cannot look back and see which was the "right path" and which the "wrong path" or perceive who chose the right or the wrong. This is a fantasy. What happened happened, and there is no way to find out who is right and who is wrong in history. The problem that it is possible to solve, right now, for each person, is who he is, where he belongs, where he wants to belong, and what it means to "belong." It is possible for some nations to solve this problem, but not for the Russians. They have no way to solve this, simply because they are too diverse. There are many Russians, and they live in a large place. The Russians right now have to deal with this dilemma: when a nation expels foreigners or resists letting them in, it is labeled "nationalism." When a nation tries to keep foreigners within its borders, it is labeled "imperialism." There is no third idea that somehow could reconcile these two.

Some balance of different races does sort of exist in America, yet America, of course, is labeled an imperialistic power by those who are not admitted and given green cards. So it is just a matter of perspective. If Russia were as rich as America and were to allow people from other countries in to share its wealth, Russia would not be called an imperialistic state, and people would be happy to come to Russia and

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stay for some time, if not forever. Indeed, this is what happened in the nineteenth century. People did come from all countries to Russia. They contributed to Russian culture and became a part of it. They changed their language, but language is not all of culture. For us writers, language may embody all of culture, but we are not the essence of any culture, we only contribute to it. Others, such as architects, musicians, composers, definitely contributed to Russian culture, sometimes without speaking the Russian language at all.

Consisting of different nations, Russia is now an unhappy and difficult place to live, but it's impossible to deny that it has a very special charm of its own and that it has managed to create a great culture. It is not a Slavic culture, it is a Russian culture, created, I repeat, by many, many different people, nations, and individuals, in that place, in a certain time. Thus, for Russians, the question of self-definition and self-identification becomes very painful, since whatever you think about yourself in this respect is denied by others. Take the question of the Crimea. To whom does it belong? To the Russians, Ukrainians, or Tartars? Or perhaps to the ancient Greeks, because they discovered that land and built a wonderful culture? There are still lots of wonderful Greek objects being found there in the excavations, so perhaps we should give the Crimea back to those who first cultivated that land. This is somehow not discussed. The Greeks are not taken into consideration when attempting to solve that problem.

The question is not just about the Crimea. I was born in what was Leningrad, now St. Petersburg, and then I moved to Moscow. So my own piece of land, my own little territory, is the space from St. Petersburg to Moscow, somehow excluding what is in between, since I travel between them on the night train. Some places in the Crimea and a few places I visited in northern Russia are also mine, because I traveled there. There are no borders, no customs crossing to go through; no one asked what right I had to go there. Although I did not always understand the culture, I always understood the language. I was at home not just because it is my country, but because it also represents a free space; there are no fences, and it's my planet. I just went there; there I was. But now I find myself denied a feeling of being at home even in Moscow or in St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was founded and built in 1703 by Peter the Great, and now there are lots of people who say that they are descended from Finnish tribes who are claiming that the land of St. Petersburg is theirs. Of course, no one is going to just hand the place to them, but their claim is no more ludicrous than any others today.

As for Moscow, the first recorded mention of it appears in 1147. Before that, the area did belong to some Finnish-speaking tribes, corroborated by the coincidence that the very word "Moscow," "Moskva"

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in Russian, meant in one of the Finnish languages "a sort of swampy landscape." Since then there are many languages that have disappeared or were somehow affected by neighboring languages, Russian included. In this way the Finnish languages disappeared from the linguistic map. Yet claims are being made in their name. As for me, now when I am in Moscow, I am supposed to remember that I am a conqueror, an imperialist, that I came and took this wonderful St. Petersburg, with all its rivers, beautiful houses, gardens, and all the culture that is exhibited in its museums, from some poor Finnish tribes that lived in huts and caught fish. I took all this from them. Along this way of thinking, then, all of what was added to the culture of Moscow, what was created from nothing, can just be dismissed. Such notions as, "This was our mud, this was our swamp, this was our air filled with mosquitoes," become very important. It is the culture that is dismissed: your culture is not to be valued because you created it by stealing it from us. That's the real point. I myself think that it is a very destructive position, and I don't want to contribute anything to these ideas.

So when I have to choose between being a nationalist or an imperialist, I try to choose the lesser of two evils, and of course, I prefer to be an imperialist. I wouldn't say that it's more comfortable; I would say that it's more productive, because it adds to culture. The idea of returning pieces of art like paintings and so on, objects that were removed many years ago, to each country, to place them in national museums, is ridiculous, because this hair-splitting will never end. For example: if someone with a French mother and an English father was born in France, then moved to Italy, and Italy didn't exist at the time but represented ten different states fighting with each other, and this poor person somehow ended up in Portugal, and he managed to make a beautiful object – then to whom does this object belong? I think that the existence of a world culture is somehow dependent on what some people would call imperialism; let it be that way.

Susan Sontag: Thank you. Norman Manea.

Norman Manea: I will speak on foreignness. The increased nationalism all around the world, the dangerous conflicts among minorities in Eastern Europe, and the growing xenophobia in Western Europe emphasize again one of the main contradictions of our time, between centrifugal, cosmopolitan modernity and the centripetal need (or at least nostalgia) for belonging. These topics remind us again and again about the very old and always new question of the *foreigner*, the *stranger*.

It seems that although he is taught to love his neighbor, man fails both to love his neighbor as he loves himself and to love the stranger

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like a neighbor. The stranger has always been perceived as different, but often also as a challenge, even as a downright threat which undermines everything that sedentary tradition has structured as a communal, unifying convention, as a national emblem. The very premise of the stranger's existence presupposes a comparison and a reevaluation, also a potential competition.

We find ourselves in a world in which the concepts of "citizen" and "citizenship" migrate far beyond the borders given at birth, in an instantly global reality created through intense world air traffic, via satellite invading everyone's home television screen. And today's world of rapid migrations and instantaneous communications is also a world on the threshold of a revolution it is still, rightly, afraid to acknowledge. I refer to the genetic revolution, which could overthrow the "human project" itself. The amazing discoveries in the field of genetics, coul soon provide a new meaning to our human destiny. Who knows? Maybe they even will discover an "exile gene." Genetics might well turn out to be a problematic challenge to the myth of equality among people. Stupendous means of genetic manipulation might force mankind to reconsider on a dramatic scale its morality and its laws, with unforeseen consequences for the future of the human race. And if we add to this our conquest of outer space, we must ask ourselves again, in this context, what does the notion called homeland mean, the challenge called foreigner, the reality called exile?

And how do we perceive from the vantage point of our unstable, transitory, and pathetic domicile called a human life the tension between the particular and the general? The modern world faces its solitude and its responsibilities without the artifice of a protective dependency or a fictive utopian coherence. Fundamentalist and separatist movements of all kinds, the return of a tribal mentality in so many human communities, are expressions of the need to reestablish a well-ordered cohesion which would protect the enclave against the assault of the unknown, of diversity, heterogeneity, and alienation. A dismembered Soviet Union and a united Europe are only two obvious examples of the kind of contradictions that convulse our present and certainly will convulse our future, too. There is, on the one hand, the need to do away with restrictive barriers and achieve a democratic, multinational, economically efficient system. On the other hand, there is the desire to replace the totalitarian state, center of tyrannical power, with a conglomerate of states, each with its own center of power and uncertain democracy.

The recent debates about the canon in American universities are highly significant; they point to the persistence in our post-industrial modern world of a tension, harbored in all of us, between the centrifugal and those still-centripetal, nostalgic tendencies. When discussing the

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question of the foreigner, one should not forget the phenomenon of colonialism and proselytism. Who, in this case, is the stranger? The colonizer and the missionary, ruling and converting? Or the native, centered in his exotic refuge, historically marginal, for whom assimilation into a unifying "civilization" is an alienation, an incomprehensible mutilation? The subject of foreignness is a complex one. Exploring it can easily lead to distortions; this is why ultimately one must search for its real meaning within the experience of one's own limited biography.

My own biography bears a European imprint in a century which has loaded its history with terrible sufferings. Europe means not only the cradle of Western democracy but also the tragic totalitarian experiment of fascism and Communism. I was five years old when, in 1941, I first left Romania, sent to death by a dictator and an ideology. In 1986, at the age of fifty, by an ironic symmetry, I left again, because of another dictator, another ideology. The Holocaust, totalitarianism, exile – these fundamental experiences of our time – are all intimately related to a definition of the stranger and of estrangement.

The National Socialist doctrine proposed a totalitarian centripetal model, centered on the idea of a pure race and a nationalist state as the embodiment of the will to power. It was an idea which found many advocates and adherents, since Nazism came to power through free elections and ruled through a relative coherence of ideal and fact. The National Socialist state embodied the most violent negation of and the most brutal aggression against the stranger. A suspect citizen with "impure" roots and dangerous opinions, the stranger became the demonic embodiment of evil. The very premises of humanity were suddenly placed under a dark question mark. Not only has the Holocaust entirely reversed the terms of debate about assimilation and the stranger, it has also reiterated, with gloomy precision, as Saul Bellow well put it, the old question: to what should one be assimilated? To what should one be assimilated, when in one of the most civilized European countries, the "final solution" could offer only one final and unique assimilation?

And to what could one assimilate oneself if, by a miracle, one had survived what today is conventionally, and even commercially, called the Holocaust? To what can the stranger who has survived hell adapt? The answer to this question is amazingly simple in its obviousness: to life, and nothing but. The survivor readapts to life; looks to life with that impertinence of banality which is life itself. The return, rebirth, and readaptation to the most elementary acts of life is at once pathetic and mysterious, both pitiable and grandiose.

I was destined to be reborn, to grow up and mature in a society which in a byzantine way combined fascism with Stalinism.

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Communism claimed a humanist vision of progress, came to power by revolution, and was maintained in power by force. As the contrast between the ideal and the real sharpened, and as the prohibition to reveal and discuss this contrast increased the terror and the economic bankruptcy, the Communist society developed a pathology of ambiguity in which apathy, hypocrisy, and duplicity became the ground rules of assimilation – that is, alienation. The centripetal Communist system did not solve, as it had promised, the old contradictions, but supplemented them with new ones. The question of the stranger in a society that estranges everyone from it – while forcing everyone to assimilate their own alienation – takes cover under dubious and sinister masks. Today's nationalist and extremist explosions in the former Communist states can surprise only those who have not directly experienced the atomization of a society in which the indoctrination of duplicity began in the cradle.

Bertold Brecht considered exile "the best school of dialectics." Indeed, the exile, the refugee, becomes a stranger as a result of change. By his very existence, the stranger is always forced to think about change.

In Berlin, during my first year in the West, I pondered daily the question of estrangement. I thought not only about the internal exile from which I had just escaped, but also about the concept of exile itself. I felt that, once again, history had spurned my aspirations and was forcing me into an adventure I had not desired. During my entire postwar life I had searched, thanks to reading and writing, for an inner resistance against often unbearable external pressure.

It is hard to believe that in a totalitarian society the "I" could survive, and yet interiority was a mode of resistance, however unavoidably imperfect. It acted as a center for our moral being, as a means of separation from the corrupting aggressiveness of the environment; as a hope, however uncertain, for the integrity of conscience. The "I" persists, even in the totalitarian environment where external pressures are always dangerous – perhaps especially there, the site of struggle between the centripetal necessity to preserve a secret, codified identity and the centrifugal tendency towards liberation.

During my agonizing Berlin transition, I was overwhelmed by doubts and questions from the past. And precisely because it happened in Berlin, I also had to confront my ethnicity, as I had already confronted the invective "alien" in my own country. Thus I already had a redundant foreknowledge of my new predicament. And precisely because the need for a homeland is more acute in those whose belonging is questioned, losing it also pains them more. On the threshold of a momentous decision, facing a new and possibly final dislocation, I had to ask myself once more who I was.

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While in Berlin, I was often advised to request from the German authorities that they recognize my German ethnicity, on the strength of my birth in Bukovina and my German linguistic roots. Many of my compatriots had done so and were already comfortably established in their new citizenship. I could have requested German citizenship, like many of my former neighbors and colleagues from Suceava, capital of the region called Buchenland. (Buchenland means "country of beech trees," although in my case, "Buchland," "country of books," would also have been a fitting name for it. It is not by chance that the greatest German poet of the last half century is the Bukovinean-born Paul Celan.) But it so happened that at that time I heard a story that made me reconsider requesting German citizenship.

A well-known German writer from Romania, who had just emigrated legally to West Germany, found herself confronting at the immigration office a clerk who was not very sympathetic towards his co-nationals from abroad. "I have heard your declarations on television, ma'am," the clerk said to her as he was checking her immigrant file. "You have left Romania because of its dictatorship. You have made violent accusations in the German press against the Romanian dictatorship. It is true?" "Yes, it is true," the writer agreed. "Then, it is obvious that you emigrated to Germany for political, not national reasons," declared the clerk. "In that case," he added in a decisive tone of voice, "you must go to the office next door and apply there for political asylum." It was an amazing bureaucratic trick, whose absurd and infallible logic was hard to challenge and even harder to accept. The German writer, known as such both in Romania and Germany, where her books had been published, was, of course, also an open adversary of the regime of political tyranny in Romania. She had finally been forced to leave her country and ask for hospitality in her new fatherland. Dumbfounded, the writer wandered for several days around Berlin, telling her adventure to friends. Finally, she returned to the same clerk at the immigration office. "I shall not request political asylum, but German citizenship," she announced, full of spite. "I am German, and I request that this fact be recognized. I have proof that cannot be doubted. I am German, my father was a member of the SS." The reluctant clerk was silent at first, then started to stammer. "In this case, of course, of course."

I could not bring the German authorities a similar proof. Yet this story troubled me and all of a sudden gave the question of identity a new dimension.

The homeland unveils its ambiguous meanings especially during the violence of rupture, which renders more urgent and more intense the need for self-questioning. The world of estrangement means also alienation from self, not only from others: exile in the humblest quotidian

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sense as much as in the purest transcendental form. So I, still agonized and bewildered, stumbled along the Berlin Wall terrified of the inevitability of exile. Was it because of the fear of freedom? For the mature adult, exile tardily reformulates the premise of initiation and becoming, reopens the gate of life's extreme risks and potential, calls into question all one's past experience. Moreover, for those prematurely traumatized, for those never truly free from the psychosis of the provisory, the threat of being thrown once again into the chaos of the unknown, exile suddenly brings out all the old, hidden fears.

One does not so much lose a precarious and dubious stability as discover oneself to be even deeper in the abyss of never-ending instability, for which apprenticeship in the school of life proves, as ever, insufficient. The writer, always a "suspect," as Thomas Mann said, an exile par excellence, conquers his homeland, his placenta, through language. To be exiled also from this last refuge represents a multiple dispossession, the most brutal and irredeemable decentering of his being, a tragic end. As Primo Levi said about the experience of the concentration camps, "to accept the eclipse of the word signaled the approach of definitive indifference." That is why, in the spring of 1988, at my first meeting with an American writer who later was to become a close friend, I pompously declared: "For me, another Holocaust has just begun." In me, there was a burning that reached all the way to the center of my being, my language, the fathomless depths of creativity.

Five years have passed since I felt that burning, and I must confess that I now feel not only the curse, but also the privilege, of being an exile. I have finally accepted this honor, doing so in the name of all that is suffering and epiphany, in the name of loneliness and challenge, of all the doubts and never-ending apprenticeship it implies, for its emptiness and richness, for the unfettering of myself and the clash within myself. And also, and first of all, for the wounds of liberty. If I have the strength to repeat Dante, "L'esilio, che m'e dato, onor mi tengo," "I hold in honor the exile I was given," then I am probably in sympathy with our centrifugal century.

Camus's stranger Meursault is estranged not only from his country, religion, and family, but also from the world and himself. He is not part of an ethnic or political persecuted minority; his loneliness is a way of bringing the absurdity of the human condition to the level of consciousness. The shot that definitively consecrates the expulsion of the stranger called man is nothing but the indifferent explosion of an impersonal sun gone crazy in the absolute banality of an ordinary summer afternoon.

The accursed K., Kafka's double, the always-guilty innocent, forever ready to justify the absurdity of an invisible and implacable justice, is the

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precursor of the alienation which pervades and defines the modern world.

The stranger, consciously or unconsciously, is always in a sort of potential or partial exile, and all real writers are perpetual exiles of this world, even if, like Proust, they hardly ever leave their rooms.

Beyond exile, real writers' relations with their countries of origin are complex and dramatic. Thomas Bernhard disavowed his own country without leaving it, forbidding the publication of his books in an Austria that refuses to analyze and acknowledge its wounds.

The artist is, no matter how paradoxical it may seem, a secret laborer of love. Is the exile a "disappointed lover"?

Against all odds, love continues to tempt the artist in exile, no matter how sarcastic, codified, or evanescent his work. He daily reinvents the premises of the difficult search; he honors his ideal reader, a stranger both like and unlike himself, with the gift of an exacting love.

Thus does the writer continue his never-ending adventure and thus does he humanize his shipwreck, wherever it may be.

Susan Sontag: Thank you. We'll take questions from our audience now.

Question: I have a question for Tatyana Tolstaya. You have drawn a binary picture of exclusionary nationalism on the one hand and imperialism, nasty but high-cultured, on the other hand. I think that sort of binary vision is very difficult to entertain. What is at issue in the former or real Soviet Union is not a choice between those two alternatives, but the fact that the republics which have seceded from the Soviet Union are trying to establish democracies where national minorities of all kinds would have ordinary human rights. Why shouldn't they eventually end up as democratic as, say, Finland, Austria, or Greece? With all the problems they may have, they are nonetheless an improvement over what Russian imperialism has brought in the past. Tatyana Tolstaya's attitude seems to treat the issue as if it were ridiculous. She gives us a picture of Finnish tribes wanting to take back Moscow and St. Petersburg, when in fact, she maintains, the reason why one can be so cultured, why there is culture at all in Russia, and why one can be so much at home all over the former Soviet Union, is that the other native cultures were deliberately discriminated against and eliminated.

Tatyana Tolstaya: I understand your point of view perfectly well; it's extremely widespread and very familiar to me. I just tried to point out that my reaction to the well-known and well-discussed conflict between so-called imperialism and the so-called democratic movement is indeed

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valid – whether applied to the new republics or elsewhere. If you followed the real events, and not those invented by theoreticians, you would be aware that right now, at this stage of separation and disintegration, there is no democracy in any of the new republics. No democratic processes are taking place there. I grant that there have been some actions that might lead to democratic regimes, but the problem in these republics now is that they are compelled to keep pushing forward to a single, obsessive issue. And that issue right now is nationalism. Nationalism contradicts democracy, because is it nationalism, the idea of "our nation," fueling the belief that foreigners should be marginalized and exiled; that if foreigners behave well, they might be tolerated. That is my point.

Question: I listened to Madame Tolstaya with a great deal of interest, because she says she has difficulty identifying herself. It's like the Russian quest for identity in the nineteenth century, of which Aleksandr Herzen wrote that we were like Janus, with one heart but two heads turned east and west. The problem in the Russian quest for identity, and perhaps the problem the Russians ought to face, is that since the moment the Russians or the Muscovites liberated themselves from the Tartars in 1462, the state expanded at the rate of fifty square miles a day for four hundred years. In the process, they took all of that mud you entertained us with by picturing it being fought for by Finnish tribes; yet that mud did belong to others originally. The point I wish to make is that ultimately you offer a choice between imperialism and nationalism. This is an oversimplification, because one can conceive of nationalism as a mosaic of various nations, in which every nation is a precious stone, which does not exclude democracy. To choose imperialism is to go back to Kipling's "white man's burden."

Tatyana Tolstaya: Your point is absolutely clear. First of all, as I said, this is not a conference of intellectuals but of emotionals. So your point of view is as emotional as mine. And not being a Russian imperialist and not feeling the problem of Russian self-identification, you cannot put yourself in my shoes; you won't put yourself in my shoes – that is the point. I am trying to explain the way Russians feel. You expressed your views and how you feel, and if you invite other people, they will say how they feel. As I said, I understand perfectly well how the emotions of everyone can be hurt differently. I tried to express to the audience the way my emotions are hurt. So there is no contradiction between us, and there is nothing to discuss; emotions are not really debatable.

Another thing is that this is a writers' conference, so I do appreciate your metaphor of a multiplicity of nations shining like stones in one

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diadem. But that is only a metaphor, and being a metaphor it is not actually real. The writer works through exaggerations, and when I speak of nationalism on the one hand and imperialism on the other hand, it is an exaggeration, a simplification; otherwise, I would have to bring in the vocabularies and the works of philosophers. We don't have time for that. I should add that when I use the word "imperialism," I don't mean "imperialism" in the Marxist sense of the word. I mean the term, the label, that is applied to the very complicated network of events happening in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe right now. Don't go back to Kipling: you will be distorting my meaning.

Question: I am of Belorussian descent. I was born in Poland, lived under the Soviet regime and the German regime, and we never had freedom. It has come to the point where our language is disappearing. But I feel that, left free in a democratic country, we would be able to handle our affairs in the best manner.

Question: My question is to Madame Dimitrova. What you presented in your remarks could probably have been written five or ten years ago, so it seems as if you were aware of what was going to happen to Sisyphus. Why then did you nevertheless choose to get involved in politics? Is the ensuing situation only a predictable result of the inevitability of man's absurdity, as the existentialists suggest, or are there other reasons?

Susan Sontag: May I say, before Blaga Dimitrova responds, that I don't see how her essay could have been written five or ten years ago. The dilemma she has depicted so eloquently is a new one, arising from the recent change in the status of intellectuals and opponents of the regime, what they face now, when there is the possibility of their having a share of power.

Blaga Dimitrova: In my remarks, I was not trying to answer only a political, tactical question. The dilemma I described is one shared by every human being. It is both an existential question and a metaphor for the present situation, the problems we face in Eastern Europe.

Question: You spoke, Madame Tolstaya, very eloquently of diversity in Russia, and I think we in America can really identity with this. We, our parents and grandparents, came from all over the globe. Within the United States are Alaska, Florida, New York City, Peoria, Illinois – there is tremendous diversity. Don't you think that for the sake of social cohesion – I won't even call it nationalism, necessarily – there is a need

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to transcend our individuality? To believe in an abstraction which we call "nation," because otherwise many people, not only intellectuals, would feel rootless and lost? Is there not such a need?

Tatyana Tolstaya: Yes, there is a need. And there are also needs inside each person that contradict every other individual's needs; that is what makes it so difficult. So when you enjoy better conditions that others, if you feel more or less comfortable on certain basic levels, then you turn to other needs. For example, if you are at ease within your language and your culture but feel oppressed by the regime you live under, then your thoughts and feelings may turn toward how to change that regime through reforms. In contrast, if you are offended within your language, then you may think about that first. It's not the regime, necessarily, that extinguishes this or that language. There are many historical processes which contribute. We have lost hundreds and hundreds of languages in the history of world culture, and it's a pity. But that's that. The only way to try to preserve a certain language is to create literature in that language, so that even when the language is extinguished, its culture remains in the literature. For example, we don't have the Sumerian language any more, but we have the great Gilgamesh Epic.

Question: I would like to comment on what Susan Sontag has said, that nationalism will become obsolete because of capitalism. That may become true in the long run, and indeed capitalism is extremely international. Yet right now, isn't the opposite true, precisely for economic reasons? Aren't nations and national groups really vying for their share of the economic pie, and in fact reinforcing nationalism? It seems that because of economic reasons, capitalistic reasons, nationalism is in fact being vitalized.

Susan Sontag: I don't think it is; I think it's actually dysfunctional. I think it will contribute to excluding these nations, or giving them a smaller share. The result will be that the proletariat, the disadvantaged, of various countries will be strongly motivated by nationalist feelings, but their rulers will have a transnational perspective. A new kind of gap is opening. Nationalist feelings, however understandable, however inevitable in the current situation, are not constructive economically. They are central to a new pattern of political and economic retardation.

Question: I came from Bulgaria four years ago, and I knew the intellectuals very well. They wanted to have someone from their circle on top. Now we have someone. Our President, Zhelyu Zhelev, is a philosopher; President Havel from Czechoslovakia is a poet. Is this

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something temporary, to fill the vacuum created by the Communist totalitarian societies, or will it become a better norm, something like the military coming to cure the social order, except that it is the artist coming to cure the human soul and the imagination?

Susan Sontag: The question was, is the fact that some of the people who led the intellectual opposition in Communist countries are now in leading government positions, as in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, only a phenomenon of transition, or something that could endure?

Blaga Dimitrova: Yes, this is a transitional event. It occurred to fill the gap, the vacuum, the lack of real political figures. We are still in a period of struggle; we are not yet in a state of real politics. And because we, the intellectuals, were the people who started the fight and are still engaged in this struggle, we must continue.

Susan Sontag: I want to interject that it always shocks me a bit when intellectuals from Europe are so quick to assert that intellectuals are not qualified to be political leaders. As a citizen of the country in which a Dan Quayle can stand in line for the presidency, I don't see why intellectuals, only intellectuals it seems, are thought to be unqualified for executive roles.

Question: My name, Vera Perlmutter Markovin, tells you something about my background. Yet I was born in this country and have never lived anywhere else. And I ask any member of the panel, or any other participant, to comment on the rise of anti-Semitism in this country and elsewhere, including Eastern Europe and Russia.

George Konrad: When people lose a great common enemy, they would like to find another one in the neighborhood. In that respect, I completely agree with Tatyana Tolstaya. Because the Jews are everywhere, they can be hated everywhere. But in countries where the level of hatred is quite high, other ethnic minorities are also the focus of such hatred. Yet because the presence of those other minorities is not as pervasive as the presence of Jews, it is the Jews who hold the championship of being hated everywhere.

Susan Sontag: Thank you very much.

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Poetry in Exile

Charles Russell: As you may have realized by now, the titles of our sessions have been interpreted quite freely at this conference. The title of this session is "Poetry in Exile"; Mr. Manea's remarks on foreignness have been perhaps the most eloquent and moving discussion of exile here so far. We will continue to float freely where the participants' thoughts take them, and we will follow them happily. We will first hear from Stanislaw Baranczak.

Stanislaw Baranczak: I'm afraid I can't get started with my prepared remarks before adding to the controversy that Ms. Tolstaya's speech in the previous session of the conference has provoked in this room. Let me make one thing clear: I'm by no means speaking from the position of an offended nationalist. The position that I have represented in my writing has always been critical of chauvinistic and self-absolving nationalism in its widest possible sense, one which Orwell put forward almost half a century ago in his memorable, "Notes on Nationalism." Nor can I be accused, more specifically, of harboring some typically Polish prejudices against Russian culture; in fact, a large chunk of my life has been spent on making it available for my compatriots by, among other things, translating Russian poetry into Polish. However, it is precisely because I side with those who prefer dialogue to hatred that I was appalled by Ms. Tolstaya's speech.

We all count on Russian intellectuals today: it is they who are expected to lead the way in eliminating hatred and introducing dialogue among the nations of the Soviet empire. But what kind of dialogue is that going to be, if a prominent and respected Russian writer dispenses so easily with the two most precious ingredients that literature can use to that end: with its ability to call things by their true and exact names, and with its ability to empathize, to understand what motivates others and what others may feel? By provocatively calling herself a Russian imperialist, Ms. Tolstaya wants to throw us off balance, to make us think in a way we are not used to, and those are very good tactics for any writer under any circumstances. But *what* she wants us to think, specifically, is something like this: "She calls herself a Russian imperialist. She, such a nice, cultured, friendly, outspoken woman, a Russian imperialist? Come on! If she is a Russian imperialist, then the whole notion of Russian imperialism must be just an absurd fabrication."

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Now the trouble is, Russian imperialism has always been anything but facetious, anything but a fabrication. It has been a very real thing, and it continues to be so – perhaps in a more morbid way – even today, after the fall of the Russian/Soviet empire. How can we prove it? Simply: by digging out the bones of the victims of mass executions, by talking to the survivors of labor camps and forced resettlements, by listening to the claims of those who wish their wrongs to be redressed at last – even if those wronged happen to be some uncivilized Tatars who are brazen enough to demand their return to Crimea, thus depriving the Russian intellectual elite of its favorite vacation spot. Ms. Tolstaya's sole answer to all the relevant points that the previous discussants raised after her speech was: "You feel it your way; I feel it my way." If not for the sake of her politics, then for the sake of her writing, I sincerely hope that she only pretends to have forgotten a very essential rule about literature. And this rule is that, while writing, you have to be genuine about your own feelings, but you also have to make a genuine effort to understand what others may feel. Without that, the claim "I feel it my way" can't help but produce not merely bad politics (this, perhaps, we could tolerate) but something much worse: bad literature.

Now, on to what I am to present here, my remarks on "The Politics of the Central European Poet in Exile." Some thirty-five years ago, almost exactly where we find ourselves at this moment – actually not in Newark itself but in one of its satellite localities called Manhattan – a splendid Polish writer named Józef Wittlin, who had lived in this country for a while and was naturally enough completely unknown here, stood in front of an American audience reading his thoughts on the subject, "The Glories and Miseries of Exile." The first sentence of his presentation was: "Among the miseries of exile, a major one is that you have to sit here and listen to my dreadful English."

I feel a deep sympathy with Wittlin in that respect, but the sentence I've just quoted is about all that I could pick up from his speech and wholeheartedly subscribe to. So many things have changed over the past thirty-five years that the steadfastness with which the English of Slavic poets has continued to be dreadful is probably one of those few messages from the Almighty reminding us that there are some isolated pockets of stability in this changing world after all. What has changed is, among other things, the very notion of exile. The title of my remarks, on closer examination, could seem overconfident, suggesting that I feel at ease discussing each of three areas of experience – poetry, politics, and exile. In my particular case, the truth is that I know more or less what poetry is; I have a slightly vaguer idea of the different meaning that politics can have. Yet as time passes, I have a less and less clear picture of what actually constitutes the notion of exile.

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I am speaking here not just about the fact that, in the case of Central and Eastern Europe at least, 1989 has brought about an obvious change in the formal status of the exiled intellectual. To begin with, it is interesting that the English language, otherwise so impressive in its richness of vocabulary and semantic precision, in this case seems to be completely satisfied to give just one word, "exile," to describe a wide array of different experiences. Especially during the eighties, one could hear the phrase "an exiled poet" applied quite indiscriminately and variously to someone forcibly expelled from his country; to someone who just happened to be in the West as a tourist when something occurred in his country which prevented him from returning; to someone who could not stand living in a country deprived of basic human rights and, as the East European saying puts it, "chose freedom" by escaping to or staying in the West; to someone who, for this or that reason, had made attempts to return to his old country but was never let in; to someone who made his home in the West for reasons that were other than strictly political; even to someone who lived in the West but was relatively free to travel home.

The word "political" also leads us straight into another area of semantic confusion. If we look it up in any English-Russian, English-Polish, English-Czech dictionary, we are bound to find a soothingly familiar-sounding equivalent such as "polityka" or "politika." But what were, before 1989, the actual meanings of phrases like "political involvement" and "politically active" in Western and Eastern Europe? In America in the eighties, I had a haunting feeling that whenever I spoke of politics or the political I was being at least slightly misunderstood. For example, my curriculum vita, under "Experience," lists: "1977: fired from the Department of Polish Philology at the University of Poznan, Poland, for political reasons." What "for political reasons" means is "as a retaliation of the regime of the Polish People's Republic for my lack of conformity with their policies, e.g., being involved in a human rights organization, publishing books underground and abroad without the regime's permission, etc." The meaning for Americans, however, has much more to do with the notion of "departmental politics" in the sense of vying for positions, personality clashes, differences of opinion about curricula. As a result, this entry on my vita was interpreted in America to mean that I had been fired from my job in Poland because I couldn't come to terms with my department chairman!

Although that misunderstanding was rather trivial, it does reflect a more essential conceptual difference. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that the Western meaning of politics is usually both more specific and more neutral than its Eastern counterpart. In America, to define your area of interest as "politics" means two things: first, that you

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are either holding or running for office; second, that you consider it a normal kind of endeavor. In the language of a former East European "dissident" such as myself, however, politics loomed first as a large and vague area of involvement in any public matter, as opposed to the extremely narrow area of one's strictly private life; second, as an area in which every action was evaluated from an ethical point of view, as if being involved in politics made one automatically a bastard or a hero. This automatic moral valuation also meant that, in particular, an East European intellectual was viewed by his society as someone from whom political involvement – of course on the side of those fighting the hated regime – was expected. Perhaps the expectation on the part of the émigre community was even stronger and more unequivocal if the intellectual in question happened to live in "exile." The expectation was strongest, naturally enough, at moments of crisis at home, when the émigre community looked for someone to express its collective feelings in a clear and memorable way.

Here, we converge on the three notions I began my remarks with: exile, politics, and poetry. But I'm not going to embark on a nerve-wracking East European tirade about how good a poet feels when he realizes he has a wide and sympathetic audience of compatriots trembling with anticipation for his every word – I am going to tell you how bad a poet may feel in this situation. And I will tell you a story that began one day in the winter of 1982, several weeks after the news about the imposition of martial law in Poland reached Boston, where I had lived since 1981. I was still reeling from the shock, which was made even worse as Poland had been virtually cut off from the outside world, as news about massive arrests among my friends sometimes included rumors of their deaths, although only months later they were mostly proved false. I was involved in trying desperately to somehow satisfy the demands of my employer, the university where I was just beginning my second semester teaching Polish language and literature; at the same time I was trying to satisfy the demands of the local émigre community, whose members often asked me to take part in some collective demonstration of protest against Poland's military regime.

Trying to meet these demands, I often felt schizophrenic, catching myself thinking simultaneously of how to explain to my American students the significance of enjambment in the syllabic verse of an obscure Polish poet of the Baroque period and of how to address the Polish-American and Polish émigre audience in a speech I was to give an hour later at a demonstration. This time the demonstration was to take place in a small square near Boston's Faneuil Hall. Some microphones had been set up on a stand in front of a building, in the midst of the crowd, but there was no platform or stage. I am a terrible public speaker, even

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in my native language, but that time I managed to gather enough energy to say something briefly which, if a little incoherent, at least had the force of conviction.

Several days later, I bumped into a woman friend on the street, a Polish émigre my age, who had been at the demonstration. She congratulated me on my speech and added, "And that poem of yours – that was very nice, too. I hadn't realized you had so much fire in your belly."

I was puzzled. "What do you mean, a poem?" I asked. My speech had been delivered in prose. Could she mean that some of it had been so flowery that it sounded like verse? Then, I suddenly understood what she was talking about. If I have ever been close to fainting, it was at that moment. What had happened at the demonstration was this: just after the end of my speech, an anonymous young man popped out from the surrounding crowd, interrupted the master of ceremonies, seized the microphone, and read aloud, with gusto and dramatic effects, a long poem that was apparently the product of his own very recent inspiration – it was written on a thick wad of paper restaurant napkins. No one, including myself, dared interrupt him. He looked like someone who would not be above kicking and screaming. Besides, during a demonstration against totalitarian oppressors, it would have looked terribly antidemocratic to suppress an act of free speech. So he continued to read his poem, *crescendo*, up to the final *forte-fortissimo*. Translated, it went something like this: "Oh, bloody General, your hands with blood do drip,/ Whilst Poland, our beloved mother, you hold in your iron grip!" On second thought, this version might be closer to the unforgettable quality of the original: "Oh, bloody General, your hands with blood are dripping,/ Whilst Poland, our beloved mother, moans and groans as you her entrails are ripping."

No doubt, my woman friend had been too far away to see that it was not I who was reciting the poem. Still, I was flabbergasted. The thought that my friend could suspect me of writing such stuff was not as unsettling as the fact that such stuff was precisely what she, an educated, moderately intelligent, and fairly well-read representative of my generation, wished and expected to hear from the mouth of a contemporary poet. She and I were both exiles. The political situation in the country we had both left was tragic. People were being killed, hopes extinguished. I was a poet. She was my audience. It seemed natural to her that I would write about General Jaruzelski's hands dripping with blood and call Poland "our beloved mother," even if I did it with atrocious rhymes. She expected nothing else. I was and I was not expected to be myself, a poet. That is, my audience expected me to put words together in a way that they thought would please them more than a newspaper article. Yet a newspaper article, sprinkled with a couple of noble-sounding

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metaphors to make it easier to swallow, was precisely what my audience did want me to provide.

This paradoxical phenomenon accounts for the fact that the exiled poet, writer or artist who is both genuinely original in his work as well as popular with his audience of fellow exiles is such a rare bird, a *contradictio in adiecto*. Of course, popularity does not go well with innovation anywhere in art, but the literary life of an émigre community has its own special rules and restrictions. People who, for whatever reasons, find themselves cut off, possibly forever, from their homeland, tend to be insecure. In a foreign country they are doomed to suffer disrespect from the natives; their national identity threatens to melt away, and they are beset with a plethora of challenges, including having to communicate in a language not their own. They do not want to be made fun of by their own contemporary poets, writers, and artists, or to be exhorted to go against what they perceive as their cultural traditions.

The examples of three great Polish authors who spent the best part of their lives in exile, the novelist Witold Gombrowicz, the poet Kazimierz Wierzynski, and the poet and essayist whom we all know, Czeslaw Milosz, serve to show us the consequences of not having given their fellow émigres what they wanted. Gombrowicz was the *bête noire* to at least a part of the émigre community because he refused to relinquish the irreverence of his writing and was never afraid to make fun of his country's most beloved stereotypes. Wierzynski became a first-rate poet only after he radically rejected his earlier traditional, patriotic style and decided to be himself, even at the cost of diminished popularity. Milosz has never shunned difficulty and intellectual complexity. As a result, before 1980 he had many more ardent followers in Poland itself than in the émigre community, even though it was precisely in Poland that his books were blacklisted.

If the simple act of following one's artistic credo puts the poet at such odds with his fellow exiles, then what can be said about situations that force him to take a public stance in regard to specific "political" issues? Invariably, the poet's craving for the concrete, the tangible, the individual puts him on a collision course with the abstract, collective, and generalization-prone attitude of a typical "politician" – unless the poet chooses not to soil his hands with "politics" at all. I have a vivid memory from the first few weeks after the imposition of martial law in Poland, when I chanced to encounter a prominent American political scientist. We were discussing the situation in Poland, when I suddenly realized that neither of us understood the other's train of thought. Although we were both speaking English, Poland meant to me the people whom I had left there and who were perhaps at that moment being shot

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at or beaten up. For the political scientist, Poland meant a flat territory in Central Europe which Soviet tanks, although they had not yet done so, would have no trouble rolling into.

In the past few decades, when poets in exile have taken political stances, they have done so on behalf of their oppressed home countries. They have used all sorts of strategies aimed at catching the attention of the scatterbrained West. Yet in doing so, exiled poets will always be too much themselves and at the same time not enough themselves. If the exiled poet tries to serve as a spokesman for his oppressed nation – and to speak out on its behalf is a moral obligation he cannot shirk – he can do so successfully only if he uses his "way with words" in a manner which is totally at odds with the principles of his craft. Ironically, while serving his compatriots as a propagandist, he does them a disservice by betraying his vocation as a poet. Propaganda is successful if the propagandist manages to make us forget for a moment the natural hiatus between the schematic and limited system of language and the unpredictable and boundless real world; if he makes us believe in the accuracy of the names that he attaches to things. Poetry, on the contrary, is successful if the poet, instead of making us overlook the discrepancies between words and things, makes us more aware of them than we possibly can be in our real lives outside the poem.

In the eyes of the West, the self-appointed poet spokesman will always be too much of a poet; there will always be something amateurish about him. Again, this is so because of the fundamental difference between the Eastern and the Western, the ethical and the pragmatic senses of the very word "politics." For the poet from Eastern Europe, politics is a sort of crusade any decent human being is obliged to join, even if he would rather stay home or if he is essentially non-militant. When, however, the poet crusader overcomes misgivings and accepts his mission, he is immediately brought down to earth – not so much by hostile infidels as by his own feeling of incompetence. His message speaks of ethical values: liberty, dignity, truth. But the questions he hears deal with the prosaic matters of economics, commerce, and business opportunities – things he may not have the faintest notion of. Is there any area of politics, in its complexity of meanings, within which the Eastern European poet who lives in the West can feel competent about by virtue alone of being a poet? Is there any community for which he may speak without betraying the principles of his craft? Answering from my personal feelings, I would say that throughout the eighties, the only moments in all of my political engagements when I didn't feel as if I were doing someone else's job, as if I would be better off sitting at my desk working on a poem, were those moments when I wrote or spoke about something that the poet can address better than any politician or political scientist. In the area of

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politics, there are two things in which the poet is an expert. Human suffering and human dialogue.

Charles Russell: Thank you. Richard Lourie.

Richard Lourie: "Is Russian literature dying?" I remember the first time that thought, keen as a paper cut, went through my mind. I was sitting with Andrei Sakharov and Elena Bonner in their kitchen in Moscow. There was good food, cognac, and that effervescence of spirit that rises in the Russian intelligentsia as the evening grows later. Suddenly, Sakharov jumped up, with an odd expression of glee and alarm on his face. "It's already eleven-thirty, time for *Vzglyad*!" I had heard of that new television program whose brash fearlessness had the whole nation watching and talking. This was March of 1988, *glasnost* at its headiest. "Come on," Sakharov said to me, "you'll like it."

We went into the room next to the kitchen which, like all rooms in Russian apartments, had a multiplicity of identities – living room, study, bedroom. Sakharov lay on the bed, seemingly relieved to be free of his body that had something of the endearing ungainliness of a giraffe. For about twenty minutes, the three of us sat in rapt silence, mesmerized by the searing reportage and the talk-show segments where people spoke passionately – not about "women who cheat on their husbands with their daughters' boyfriends," but of prison and history. Sakharov was right; I liked the program, but that was putting it mildly. I had never seen television like that, truly wired to every nervous system and truly creating collective consciousness. It was invisibly weaving in the lacunae of memory, a nation in conversation, confession, catharsis.

"But, Andrei Dmitrievich," I said, "this is going to be the death of Russian literature."

"God forbid!" he cried with real pain and a touch of impatience – he wanted to keep watching.

Yet in this century, God is not famous for intervention. If Russian literature dies, it will be of natural causes, historical forces. Television is one obvious source of the demise. We know that television can not only transmit reality but become reality. Every event gets its signature image: champagne and dancing on the Berlin Wall. The war in Iraq took the process one step further. The signature image of that event was the one that originated in the television set in the nose of a smart-bomb, television seen on television. The great high-tech forces of the age take different form in different places. Mostly distraction in America, television in Russia became a means of constructing consciousness. In either case, whether television saps or inspires, the net effect for literature is much the same. I have seen Gabriel García Márquez argue, on television, that

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novelists should not be snobbish about television and should use it to reach millions more minds than any book ever could. But as Russia shows, television is at its best when it is a nonfiction medium. The imagination, forever childish, loves the gigantic and the miniature, preferring the grandeur of the big screen or the intimacy of the page. Therefore, television is inimical to literature, both fiction and nonfiction, co-opting the one, debraining the other.

Television is only one enemy and not the greatest of them either. There is the nature of Russian literature itself, as it has taken form in the last two hundred years, all that there really is of it except for a few scattered medieval masterpieces. From its very inception, Russian literature was defined by its relationship to the state. It could be either for it or against it, but it could not be apart from the state. This was not literature's choice but a choice imposed on it by the state. It started when Catherine the Great began personally to censor books, merely her right as an enlightened despot and correspondent of Voltaire. In the margins of Radischev's *Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, Catherine wrote, "Worse than Pugachev!" She was referring to the Cossack who had led an army against her state, and she was right. It was the writers and the readers who would bring down the old Russia.

And when they did, some sort of perverse Hegelian antithesis occurred – the censorship was never worse, the penalties for writers never more severe than under the Bolsheviks, themselves men of the written and spoken word. (Stalin was known to quote Walt Whitman.) In any case, under the Soviets, literature once again found itself in a position not of its own choosing. That situation came to an end sometime in the late eighties, though it would be difficult to point to a single publication that could effectively mark the end of the stranglehold of censorship. I do remember asking to interview a Russian priest for a book I was doing and being refused because, as he put it, "There are only two books – the Bible and *The Gulag Archipelago*. What need is there for any more?" By his standards, the moment when both Scripture and Solzhenitsyn were readily available marked the official end of the two-hundred-year life of Russian literature as a literature forced into engagement by censorship.

So it turns out that like everything else in the country, Russian literature is in need of *perestroika*. But as we know from both theory and practice, *glasnost* precedes *perestroika*, if only because it is easier to shout than to to produce. *Glasnost* too proved something of an enemy to literature. Only newspapers and television were able to keep pace with the headlong course of events that produced a sort of "history shock" in Russians. Suddenly there was too much important information. Russia

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went from the days when every newspaper said the same thing to a situation where there were at least seven you had to read just to barely keep up. Poets complained they didn't have time to think, let alone write. And readers waxed nostalgic for Brezhnev's stagnation when they had been able to reread the classics in unhurried calm. Once again with some peculiar local conditions, Russia had entered the information age, and there was no turning back.

Glasnost, as word and idea, had a good lineage. It even appears in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, published in 1866, when the character Svidrigailov, of all people, looks back at the past and says, ". . . a few years ago, still in the days of beneficent freedom of expression . . . " – "freedom of expression" being the translator's equivalent of *glasnost*. And Solzhenitsyn was calling for *glasnost* in the seventies.

Perestroika was a less inspired choice of slogan. The "pere" is Russian for the prefix "re"; "stroy" means "build" and is echoed in the English "destroy"; the "ka" at the end is just a Slavic kiss of suffix. But *perestroika* conjures images of machines and factories and edifices being rebuilt and restructured. It is an image that emerges from the essentially "engineering" cast of the Soviet mind and recalls Stalin's labeling of writers as the "engineers of souls." It presupposes something that was built and that can be rebuilt, yet the tinkering with the machine of the economy and of politics that has been done has already proved inadequate. Literature too will need more than a mere overhaul.

Still, when speaking of the death of Russian literature, one must preserve a sense of measure. Andre Dementiev, editor of the well-regarded literary monthly *Youth*, took me to lunch at the elegant restaurant Sophia on Mayakovsky Square, where a meal of black caviar, sturgeon, Stroganoff, vodka, espresso, comes to less than sixty cents, even with a wildly extravagant tip. The customers wore fur hats and breathed clouds of vapor, and the waitresses simply shivered. The heating system in the restaurant had inexplicably gone out, and the only vodka available was American, another mystery. In Russia no one ever really quite knows anything. The editor clutched his head, then smoothed back his hair and sat up straight.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"The circulation of my magazine has fallen by two thirds," he said.

"From what to what?" I asked.

"From three million to one million," he replied.

I didn't know whether to put my arm around him or to laugh out loud. All the literary journals in America put together wouldn't reach knee-high to that number. And so I ended up feeling a strange emotion – compassion tinged with irony.

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Russians are reading less because they are working more, because books and periodicals have become expensive, a natural result of subsidized publishing having disappeared at the same time as censorship did. Literature had been a state monopoly, and underground writing, *samizdat*, was the literary equivalent of the black market. A real economy doesn't need a black market, and an uncensored culture doesn't need much of an underground literature. The late twentieth century, increasingly attached to image and information, hardly needs literature at all.

Russian literature is also in danger of dying because of the waning of the language itself. Russian was the *lingua franca* of the Soviet empire, as much a key to upward mobility as Party membership. It was spoken by every educated person from Lithuania to Siberia and dominated to such an extent that even some national literatures began to be written in Russian. The fate of the Russian language had been tied to the fate of the empire. Now, cultural anticolonialism has set in, and linguistic sensibilities are very prickly. Ukraine's longstanding wish to not be called "the Ukraine" has at last been granted. Streets, cities, countries, are undergoing linguistic metamorphoses – Belorussia becomes Belarus, Kurgizia becomes Kirghizstan, Leningrad becomes St. Petersburg. There used to be a popular Soviet joke about an old man interviewed by a newspaper. "Where were you born?" asks the reporter.

"St. Petersburg," he answers.

"Where did you grow up?"

"Petrograd."

"Where do you live now?"

"Leningrad."

"And where would you like to live?"

"St. Petersburg."

In the topsy-turvy world of Russian politics, the dream of the old man in the joke has at last come true.

People from the classes dispossessed by the Bolshevik Revolution were know as *bvyshie*, a nightmarish word to translate. "Formers" would be a clumsy approximation; "has-beens," closer in grammatical form, brings the wrong associations to mind – yellowed press clippings, aging flesh, rented rooms. Now *bvyshie* is heard often in Russian, in connection with "the former Soviet Union"; the circle is complete.

Perhaps Kazakhstan has the trickiest linguistic problem of all. The real name of the people is *Kazaks*, with a hard "k," not *Kazakhs*, and the name of the country should be *Kazakstan*. In her book, *Central Asians under Russian Rule: A Study in Cultural Change*, Elizabeth Bacon writes in a footnote, "It was in 1936, when Stalin accidentally mispronounced *Kazak* in a public address, that the Turkish-Mongol people of Central

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Asia became Kazakh, and their republic Kazakhstan." Stalin's thick Georgian accent smears a "k," and the name of an entire nation is changed! The Kazakhs have voted to change the color of their flag from the red of Communism to the green of Islam, but they're still not quite sure what to do about their name, which, with the original hard "k" means, ironically, "the free."

Fewer people will be speaking Russian. In East Berlin, every German I spoke with who had learned Russian in school refused to speak it with me, even though it meant having a simple-minded conversation in my pidgin German. Every day memory cells containing Russian words will dim out in millions of brains. The Russian birth rate is declining, and Russian men are dying earlier all the time. Nature and history conspire against the Russian language. As the international language, English is triumphant. Even the most humble sidewalk kiosk in Moscow, with little for sale besides Marlboros, a gray knitted sweater, and a few watchbands, will display its name in English, the characters themselves more chic than Cyrillic ones. Russian youth adores English characters, especially on T-shirts and sweatshirts. And it is now *de rigeur* for educated Russians to sprinkle a little English into their conversation. English is also wafted through the air on music, rock-and-roll having become the soundtrack of the age.

It may not be entirely bad that the Russian language is in a state of contraction. It is in desperate need of purification. In the years of Communism, the language was polluted every bit as much as the environment. The effluents of bureaucratese have deformed syntax. Russian has become a language of blood-stained abstractions – collectivization, repression, rehabilitation. And there is simply no calculating the damage done to it by all those Marxist categories with their grandiose fuzziness. Yet paradoxically, Russian literature's greatest enemy now may well be the very forces that are liberating the society. Those are the "objective" historical forces of which the Marxists were so fond. So then does Russia arrive at Fukuyama's "end of history," voting, consuming, and drifting with all the rest of us. Writing thirty years before Fukuyama, Andrei Siniavsky said in his book that still bristles with brilliance and irony, *On Socialist Realism*:

> The modern mind cannot imagine anything more beautiful and splendid than the Communist ideal. The best that it can do is to restore to circulation old ideals of Christian love and the liberty of the individual. But it has been unable so far to set up a new Purpose.

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Though Fukuyama and Siniavsky use different language, their vision is the same: history coming to a spiritual dead end. That too can be a source of literature and subject for it, but not for very long.

This does not mean in the least that important literature will cease to come from Russia, only that literature will lose its importance. Under the new dispensation, cultural archetypes will shift. As the ruble stabilizes and the society normalizes, the image of the poet will lose its tragic and heroic charisma. Societies are as ruthless as nature in producing what they need. And what Russia needs now, and will need for a good while to come, is sober citizens. Otherwise, the country will plunge back into chaos, tyranny, and literature. It is not a heartening prospect – Russian literature, that great lugubrious whale, accustomed to sounding the depths, now beached on the postmodern shore where the continent of history ends.

Yet hope is to be found in the unlikeliest places. *The New York Times* of April 4, 1992 reported on the forthcoming trial of a Russian serial killer, a fifty-six year-old man identified only as Citizen Ch. A father, grandfather, and Communist Party member, he murdered throughout the former Soviet Union, from Rostov on the Don where he lived to Leningrad and Uzbekistan. There were more than fifty-three of his victims, making it a world record and surpassing the American record of thirty-seven. The article notes, "His weapons were a knife, his hands, and his teeth, and after thirty minutes of pathological frenzy a blinded, torn, and sexually mutilated corpse would be added to the growing list."

Unlike his American counterparts whose psyches were warped by disturbances in the family romance, Citizen Ch. was deranged by history. His brother had been abducted and eaten during Stalin's artificial famine of the early 1930s, and has father, a POW captured by the Nazis, was treated as a traitor when he returned to Russia. Born in 1936, Citizen Ch. was born in the midst of the great terror. Citizen Ch. was a serial killer in a society that had been ruled by the greatest serial killer of all time, Joseph Stalin. Citizen Ch. was a cannibal in a society that saw three serious outbreaks of cannibalism during the twentieth century: during the real famine of the early 1920s, during Stalin's fabricated famine of the early 1930s, and during the nine-hundred-day siege of Leningrad. At its apogee, ten thousand people a day were dying in Leningrad, and human-flesh butcher shops were opened in apartments. As Nadezhda Mandelstam wrote in *Hope against Hope*:

> Every section of the population has been through the terrible sickness caused by the terror, and none has so far recovered, or become fit again for normal civic life. It is an illness that is passed on to the next

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> generation, so that the sons pay for the sins of the fathers and perhaps only the grandchildren begin to get over it – or at least it takes a different form with them.

We are too quick to assume that Russia is well on its way to becoming what it so sincerely longs to be – a normal society. Russia needs more than loans and roads, storage facilities, and time to learn tolerance and trade. It must also cure itself of the madness of the twentieth century. The case of Citizen Ch. proves how deep those derangements run. He may be an extreme example, but he is an example nonetheless. There are many, many Russian families harboring tales of cannibalism and of returning soldiers treated as traitors for remaining alive.

In all this there may be some advantage for Russian literature. The logic of Christianity, that sins must be atoned for, creates a dynamic that can energize a culture. Italy and Germany, for example, created vital art in the postwar period in part because those societies were compelled to struggle with the sins of the fathers, the sins of fascism. If political conditions allow, Russian literature can transform itself from a literature of opposition to a literature of self-analysis and self-healing. Many observers have noted the lack of a certain type of self-knowledge in Russian culture. The Polish writer Kazimierz Brandys writes in *A Warsaw Diary*:

> Russian self-knowledge does not seem to extend past certain boundaries that have been drawn in their psyche, and Russian self-criticism shrinks from what is hidden within them at the very source of Russian unfreedom. . . . Do they see a connection between their own individual psychology and their social existence or don't they?

Russians not only need to view their complicity in their own fate but also to ruthlessly scrutinize what that fate has in turn done to them. But more than self-analysis is needed. The process that is required is as closely bound to religious psychology as to analytical psychology. There must be confession, atonement, and forgiveness, the hardest art. The atonement for sin and the forgiveness of it are spiritual processes that must take place within the Russian collective psyche, if Russians are to be a human community again and not just an aggregate of victims and victimizers.

In the Russian Orthodox religion, Easter is the great holiday, celebrating the miracle of resurrection. And it was Russia who gave the world its most radical philosopher, Nikolai Fyodorov. He saw no contradiction between Christianity and science, and he called on science to work for what was the obvious greatest possible good – the literal res-

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urrection of all those who had ever lived. The archetype of rebirth is strong in Russia's culture, and the country has come back to life more than once already – after the Mongol invasion, after the twenty-seven million dead of World War Two. And now the very logic of its history demands that it purify its spirit and be reborn, or else it will perish from its own poisons. Yes, Russia is dying, but only so it can rise again from the dead, imitating Christ not in ethics but in actions.

Charles Russell: Thank you. The next speaker is Sidney Monas, who will speak on "Russian Literature and Exile."

Sidney Monas: "A great writer is a second government." Solzhenitsyn's well-known pronouncement, meant to apply everywhere, has a special resonance for Eastern Europe and Russia, where so often and for so long when political institutions were repressed, malformed, or nonexistent, literature has been the vessel of national self-expression. Russian literature in particular had its origins in modern times, in the eighteenth century, as part of a truly monumental project to transform Russia, to Europeanize, modernize, and civilize it. Thus from its beginning Russian literature was intimately bound to the state, to the Petrine transformation, and acquired its high afflatus from a close association with the sustaining moral and grandiose aspiration of Peter the Great's project.

The subsequent history of Russian literature has not, of course, been a rose-parade, and the relationship between a bureaucratic autocracy and the rich, complex, and profound literature that developed in the course of the nineteenth century took a radically different turn. Metaphorically speaking, one might say that Russia's literature went into a kind of deeply estranged exile from its marriage to the state. Nevertheless something of the old eighteenth-century aura still floated wistfully around the edges of the relationship, and for all the subsequent estrangement, Russian literature never entirely lost its sense of a moral or aesthetic commitment to a grandiose utopian project.

Some individual writers may have pitted themselves against its imposition as an unfair burden when what they wanted was merely to entertain, or to share some particular insight, or to create a small fictive or poetic world exempt from the prevailing or contending ethical and political forces. There were such writers, of course, but they always had to contend with the weight of the dominant tradition, and inevitably that tradition affected them. The literary calling was a high one. Yet somehow, and especially for those to whom it imparted a heady success, it was not quite high enough, and it seemed to point to an adjoining field on a yet loftier level – prophecy. In Nabokov's wonderful short story, "A Russian Rimbaud," a promising young avant-garde poet abruptly

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disappears. On the anniversary of his disappearance, celebrated as a political event by the radical intelligentsia, he reappears as a guilt-ridden, repentant pilgrim who has seen a brighter light. Taking the microphone, he urges his audience of intellectuals to repent and to experience, as he has, a religious rebirth.

Tolstoy, too, felt the impulse to move from the "limitations" of a merely aesthetic commitment to the claims of absolute authority that distinguish the prophet. The chains that bound Dostoevsky to hard labor and a prison cell were attached to his coffin and clanked down Nevsky Prospect as thousands followed his body to the grave. The themes of the "new man" and of the burden of the "intelligentsia obligation" to the suffering peasant, raised by Chernyshevsky and Nekrasov in the 1860s, echoed through all the works and institutions of Russian literature for almost three decades. Nor did the utopian-transformative strain disappear with the rising influence of decadence and symbolism in the 1890s. Aesthetics assumed a new importance. There was a vital reanimation of religious life and a strong reaction against the pseudo-scientific, positive-realist attitudes of the 1860s. Portentousness, grandiosity, outsize gestures with too little motivation, a certain muteness and inexpressibility of final aspiration, all these could be seen as the characteristic weaknesses of Russian literature. They can be seen parodied in Milan Kundera's well-known outburst against Dostoevsky or in the more popular and philistine vein of S. J. Perelman's and Woody Allen's lampoons of the Russian novel. The strength of this literature, however, lay in its seriousness of purpose, its self-assurance, and the depth of its humane vision. The great scholar Erich Auerbach valued Russian literature for its fresh recapitulation of a Christian creatural-realist aesthetic, seeing it as the realm of a kind of secularized Christianity.

Curiously, neither did the state entirely forget its bond to literature. There was always something essentially literary about Russian civilization, by which I mean an externally imposed shaping artifice that characterized the state as much as it did the intelligentsia, which was, after all, the state's creation. But the intelligentsia had been created to perform middle-class functions without the independently sustained economic base of the European bourgeoisie. Literature identified itself on the one hand with the intelligentsia's need to achieve some of the fostering warmth, protection of rights, and opportunity for autonomous activity that were provided in Europe by the formations of civil society. On the other hand it aligned itself with the basic humility of the all-enduring peasant. Such identification seemed threatening to the stability of the autocratic regime with its insecurely grounded social base. Yet censorship laws were all worded as if their intention were to "protect" literature, not to suppress it. Censors were often highly educated people and included in their

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number at least one great poet, Tiutchev, and one almost-great novelist, Goncharov. A censor's lot was not a happy one; like the imperial eagle, he needed two heads. Nicholas the First's chief censor, Uvarov, wished literature would simply go away or at least be quiet for a decade or two. The "grand inquisitor" Konstantin Pobedonostsev wanted literature "frozen" to prevent it disturbing the status quo.

In addition to censorship and bans on publication by certain writers, the old regime punished some writers convicted in its courts by restricting their right of residence, confining them sometimes to a family estate or home, sometimes to a certain area, always depriving them of access to St. Petersburg or Moscow, and often forbidding them access even to provincial capitals where they might, it was felt, make trouble. Exile was a sentence tacked on to the harsher punishments of prison and hard labor. In itself it was not so much a punishment as a means of political sanitation, keeping the troublesome and politically infected out of the centers of activity. It was a sentence inflicted in bad conscience – "what does one do with such people?" – and for the writer it confirmed the alienated, exiled state of the literary enterprise. Physical exile was the concrete embodiment of the spiritual exile from the state into which literature had entered.

The Bolshevik regime during its first few years, which Akhmatova later referred to as its "vegetarian period," made some partly successful attempts to attract important writers to its own revolutionary-utopian vision. Blok, the mystic, thought he saw a wraithlike Christ figure leading on the revolutionary guards, even as they shot at him. Mayakovsky, whatever his distaste for proletarians in the flesh, responded to the dazzlement of the brave new world projected by the regime, and he turned his gifts to work for its propaganda machine. But of the *intelligenty* who survived the grim years of the civil war, at least half chose to emigrate later. The year of decision was 1922. It is true that Berlin provided a kind of halfway house for the émigre community, where Bolshevik publishing houses were at work, and from which (for another year or two anyway) one could still return to Russia. But Russian culture, including literary culture, virtually split in two at this juncture, with half of it in exile abroad.

Within Russia not all writers who remained supported the Revolution, as did Esenin and Mayakovsky. Some stayed in spite of their distaste for the regime, out of patriotic, or matriotic, reasons; out of some sense that their culture and the Russian soil were indissolubly linked. But by the end of the decade Esenin and Mayakovsky had gone into the ultimate exile of death by suicide, while many others, who lived on, entered a spiritual inner exile. They published, if at all, only with the greatest difficulty, and that would soon stop. On the whole they did survive, es-

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pecially in the blood-drenched decade of the 1930s, better than did those writer-Bolsheviks like Babel and Platonov, who supported the revolution yet were loyal as well to their own artistic standards. Yet even as the totalitarian regime decimated Russia's literary talent, there was an implied respect. "They take poetry seriously in Russia," Osip Mandelstam remarked to his wife. "Where else do they shoot people for it?"

The bleakest times for Russian literature were those between 1934, when socialist realism was proclaimed the ideology of the propaganda state, and 1954, when, after Stalin's death, the labor camps began gradually to disgorge the inmates who had survived. Although a gifted Soviet scholar, Gukovsky, made a clever comparison between the state-encouraged literature of the eighteenth century, with its strong didacticism and its tendency to apotheosize the ruler, and socialist realism, the comparison is malapropos. In the eighteenth century writers came to the state freely, regarding it as the sponsor and harbinger of civilization, of a revolution in manners and morals in which they sincerely believed. Socialist realism merely reduced literature to party propaganda.

By the end of the Second World War the outstanding writers whose reputations had been established before they left Russia were all dead – Bunin, Merezhkovsky, Gippius, Khodasevich, Georgii and Viacheslav Ivanov. The greatest among them, Tsvetaeva, had returned to the Soviet Union, and in 1941 she killed herself, joining the terrible swollen ranks of the Stalin-dead – Mandelstam, Babel, Platonov, Pilniak, and all the others. Nabokov, the most gifted among the younger writers, had switched languages and moved to America, although he was not yet well known.

Yet very shortly, even in the USSR, things began to stir. Ilya Ehrenburg's 1954 novel, *The Thaw*, without displaying anything so miraculous as a fully resurrected talent, nevertheless showed traces of individual creativity and hinted at dissent. Later Ehrenburg began to write his memoirs with the avowed intent of "building bridges" to a lost generation, of crossing the abyss left by the disasters of the Stalin period. Then in February of 1956, Khrushchev made his secret speech denouncing Stalin's "abuses" of Party members. Although most Kremlinologists in the West pointed out that neither institutions nor formal procedures had changed, at least a few Western literary scholars realized that the genie was out of the bottle and could never be stuffed back in. The Stalinist system could not be maintained without Stalin. The de-Stalinization campaign launched by Khrushchev and aided by the "men of the sixties," young technocrats eager to cast off a rigidified and meaningless ideology, nevertheless found themselves hamstrung by the collapse of the only authority that had vested them with the power to act. It turned out that there was still such a thing as literature in Russia. Boris Pasternak, one of

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the few survivors of the great age of Russian literature, a poet who had limited his work to translation since the end of the war, decided to try to publish the massive, ill-shaped, awkward novel he had been at work on for many years in a kind of attenuated inner exile.

This is not the place to recapitulate the well-known details of the *Doctor Zhivago* affair. But the award of the Nobel Prize in Literature to him, followed by Pasternak's forced and somewhat ignominious rejection of it, at least had the effect of permitting the editorial board of *Novy Mir* to publish its reasons for rejecting the novel, along with generous quotations from the novel itself. Didactic, clumsy, lyrical, personal, romantic, the novel clearly rejected Marxism and expressed disillusionment in the regime established by the Bolshevik revolution. Yet it seemed a very mild response to the horrors of the Stalin years, a growing awareness of which the returnees from the *gulag* brought with them. The *gulags* – that vast empire of labor camps created by the Stalin regime – became the crucial issue of de-Stalinization. Fear of a return to the use of the *gulag* was a potent weapon in Khrushchev's hands against his more retrograde *nomenklatura*. Fear that the magnitude and depth of the degradation of the *gulags,* once they became known, could and would destroy whatever shreds of authority remained to the Party apparatus that was his constituency limited the extent of the exposure he would or could permit. These were the bounds within which Khrushchev and his supporters moved. Then in November 1962, with Khrushchev's express permission, *Novy Mir* published a novella by Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. It created a sensation.

The nature and extent of the labor camps were not exactly news either in Russia or abroad. David Dallin and Boris Nikolaevsky had published a well-informed book on them in English as early as the 1950s. Gustav Herling and other foreigners had recounted their experiences in print. In the Soviet Union itself few families had not had a member or close friend shipped off to the camps, and although those who came back were far fewer, they were still numerous. But Russian culture is logocentric, and there is a deep need among Russians to put into words what is felt and experienced; what is felt and horrendously experienced must indeed be given a public voice. Solzhenitsyn became more than a culture hero, almost a saint. Other novelists had touched on the existence of the camps and even hinted at their nature and extent. But it was Solzhenitsyn's central subject. And his hero was not an intellectual but an ordinary Russian peasant, a simple, honest, decent, dignified man, a literary creation that drew on deep resonances from the poetry of Nekrasov and the powerful populist strain in Russian nationalism. In terms of political importance, the *Doctor Zhivago* controversy seemed to

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dwindle into insignificance. Not only the editorial board of *Novy Mir* but also Khrushchev himself might well have wondered if Solzhenitsyn had not gone too far.

Solzhenitsyn was allowed to publish only two more short stories. In the meantime, he wrote long exhortatory letters to the patriarch of the Russian church and to the leaders of the Communist Party, circulating them as well in *samizdat*. He compiled an anthology, *From Under the Rubble*, which was at the same time a declaration of independence and the assertion of a kind of gulag republic, and it, too, circulated in *samizdat*. He completed his monumental masterpiece, *The Gulag Archipelago*, and negotiated for its publication abroad. He negotiated as well with the Brezhnevian *apparatchiki*, exactly as if he were a head of state or, perhaps more accurately, a commanding general maneuvering his troops. All this is eloquently described in his extraordinary book, *The Oak and the Calf*. The *apparatchiki* arrested him, put him bodily on a plane, and shipped him off abroad into exile. His massive three-volume *Gulag Archipelago* became the most forbidden, zealously sought-after of all banned imports.

Solzhenitsyn abroad did not cease to be a major force, yet it is arguable that Brezhnev had chosen cannily in exiling him. Clashes between Solzhenitsyn and his Western admirers were soon in the offing. For him, the promising future of Russia lay in the wisdom learned in the gulag, the wisdom of suffering. The "new man" he projected in his fiction was really the "old man," the passive, suffering Russian peasant, now intellectualized, rendered adaptable and inventive by the harshness of circumstance, no longer resistant to technology but still steeped in the ethics of traditional Orthodoxy. Indeed, the historical link between Orthodoxy and Russianness was reaffirmed by Solzhenitsyn. While he urged upon the Orthodox greater tolerance for Old Believers and converts, he nevertheless all but reasserted the traditional shibboleth of Russian nationalism, that to be Russian meant to be Orthodox. He disdained the entire third wave of Russian emigration largely on the grounds that it was "ninety percent Jewish." In the cycle of historical novels he is still writing, *The Red Wheel*, the traditional language of anti-Semitism is invoked, although Solzhenitsyn has denied he is in any way anti-Semitic.

Three years after the publication of *Ivan Denisovich* and a year after the downfall of Khrushchev, Andrei Siniavsky and his friend Yuli Daniil were arrested and, in what looked like a revival of the show trials of the 1930s, this time with literature in the dock instead of old Bolsheviks, they were brought to trial on the charge of publishing anti-Soviet propaganda abroad. It was the era of *samizdat*. A year earlier a young Leningrad poet, Joseph Brodsky, had been sentenced to work on a col-

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lective farm in the Arctic Circle, ostensibly as a cure for "parasitism" but actually for circulation of poems which declared their independence from the official canon. Collecting Brodsky's poems and circulating them in typed or hectographed copies became a cause for further trials and exiles stretching on into the 1970s, from Gabriel Superfin to Efim Etkind. The Siniavsky trial assumed a special importance, however, because a young writer named Aleksandr Ginsburg managed to make stenographic notes of the proceedings later circulated in *samizdat* and published abroad. Siniavsky argued eloquently in his own defense for the integrity and autonomy of a work of art, and although he lost his court case, the argument was nevertheless made successfully to a small but intensely attentive public.

After completing his sentence, Siniavsky was allowed, even pushed, to go abroad where, in Paris, he founded the still-interesting and important journal *Sintaksis*. Unlike Solzhenitsyn, Siniavsky had no plan or determination to "save Russia," no claim to spiritual privilege other than that implied in an affirmation of the importance of art and the significance of its autonomy. A deeply religious man, he nevertheless questioned the link between Orthodoxy and Russianness. His journal and the Solzhenitsyn-oriented *Kontinent* were involved in frequent literary clashes. His own book about the experience of the gulag, *A Voice from the Chorus*, makes no claim to moral authority and neither offers a political message nor displays the ambition of a comprehensive historicity. It is merely a collection of "voices," of overheard fragments, and some of the author's responsive musings.

I have mentioned Joseph Brodsky. As one of the most important *samizdat* poets of the 1960s, he served as well as a sort of "saving remnant" of the major traditions of Russian poetry and of the modern Russian culture that had begun to emerge before the First World War. At a crucial point in his life, he met Anna Akhmatova, who befriended him, and he became one of a small group of Leningrad poets known as "Akhmatova's orphans." She was not so much a direct poetic influence – his sensibility and style were radically different from hers – as she was a teacher, guide, and custodian of a cosmopolitan culture, an exemplar of courage in isolation and adversity. Although he left Russia reluctantly, and with the exile's fear of losing touch with what was vital in his language, Brodsky was by temperament and stance a born exile. It gave his poetic style a mordant objectivity and reinforced his artistic autonomy and his resistance to being politically co-opted by any cause.

I cannot end without mentioning Andrei Amalrik, a gifted and prophetic writer now too easily forgotten. In 1968 he wrote a small book called, *Will the Soviet Union Survive Until 1984?*, which circulated

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in *samizdat* and was later published abroad. He had not at the time read Orwell; the date in his title was suggested by Amalrik's friend Vitaly Rubin, who had. Although it was not meant in any case as a precise prediction, Amalrik turned out to be off the mark by only seven years. Everything in his book – its shrewd analysis of social formations, of the role of culture and the intelligentsia, especially of the insecurity of the *nomenklatura*, was prescient and eloquent. If anything, he slightly overestimated the force it would take to bring the Soviet Union down. He envisioned it as being the result of a military engagement with China when, in fact, a much lesser power, Afghanistan, served as well. Not one of our professional Kremlinologists in the West, or for that matter the researchers of the CIA, anticipated what Amalrik with his vibrant antennae and fine literary sensibility had seen clearly and with true poetic vision – the clay feet of the Kremlin giant.

Russian literature went into exile in part in 1922 and in entirety by 1934, either by spiritual emigration or by displacement abroad. It never entirely lost its sense of power to change lives or its utopian strain. Yet the shameless Bolshevik parody of that strain in the propaganda state encouraged a stance that reached beyond politics; it revalued aesthetic standards and derailed respect for traditional culture free of the compulsions of narrow nationalism. The attitudes formed in exile reflected a new trend towards objectivity and toward objectification, in the strong sense that for writers the proper arena is literature itself. In the turmoil since the August 1991 coup, no writer has played the kind of active political role that distinguished Sakharov or even that of the historian Yuri Afanasiev. Solzhenitsyn, the best known and most compelling figure among the external exiles, has seemed curiously out of touch. Yet the writers and poets of Russia have been at work as, in Hegel's image, "the moles of history." When the ground collapsed, it was not without their doing.

Charles Russell: Thank you. How horrible it is to be an administrator and in the position of having to cut short the words of poets and writers. Our next speaker will be Oksana Zabuzhko.

Oksana Zabuzhko: I have titled my remarks, "Ukrainian Literature as a *Dramatis Persona* in History." In one of his essays, Grigory Pomerants, in my opinion the most independent-minded thinker in Russia today, tells the story of a fellow countryman who happened to be in Prague in the autumn of 1968. A Czech woman on the street recognized the man's Russia accent and asked him whether he was Russian. Since he was a Jew, he might have found a good way to avoid this question, but instead he

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answered, "Yes, I am." Her next question was, "Aren't you ashamed?" to which he replied, "Yes, I am ashamed." Pomerants cites this anecdote to illustrate what he believes should be the ethos of the intellectual in a totalitarian state. I believe that his countryman, in answering as he did, rescued the dignity of a nation. As a Ukrainian, I also experienced an overwhelming and irresistible envy of that man's shame: to be ashamed of your government's actions implies that you feel a personal responsibility for them. It means that you identify with the state and statehood, regardless of whether or not you approve of its politics. It is the ethos of "my country right or wrong." This kind of shame is the privilege of true citizenship, and that is what made me envious.

I could not have felt any responsibility for the occupation of Prague, because what was done to Czechoslovakia in 1968 had been done to my country in 1919, with disastrous consequences. Since then Ukraine as a separate political entity disappeared. It was deprived of its own voice and became a literal nonentity. If we assume that a homeland is not just a spot on the map but a country with whose actions one identifies, we can say that until very recently the Ukrainians have been deprived of their homeland. The question of whether it is preferable to have a homeland you are ashamed or or not to have any homeland at all is tantamount to the question of whether it is better to spend all your life in prison or not be born at all. The question itself, as we know, is not by any means merely rhetorical, but I do not intend to focus on it here.

My major concern is literature, for it was literature that, under the circumstances, assumed the role of a substitute homeland for the Ukrainian people. For the two centuries since Ukraine lost its autonomy and fell under complete Russian domination in the late eighteenth century, its history has had a passive voice. With just a few brief interludes, such as the Ukrainian National Republic of 1918-1919, almost all of its history has been imposed upon it. In the nineteenth century, such nations were called nonhistorical. Only now, with the advent of independence, is this coming to an end for Ukraine. It is no wonder then that through the last two centuries, it was almost exclusively in the realm of literature, more specifically of poetry, that the genuine vitality of Ukraine was expressed and that the suppressed collective sensibility of its people found an outlet. In essence, it was a product of romantic nationalism, with its ideal of nationhood based upon language. From it comes the perception of the poet as a charismatic leader and redeemer of a nation, so spectacularly expressed, for instance, in Polish messianism.

What is distinctive about the Ukrainian experience and what makes it unique compared to the fate of other Eastern European literatures is not just the persistency with which its vision survived, but rather the continually endangered condition of the Ukrainian language. There were

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recurring prohibitions against it, introduced by the tsarist and then the Soviet government, with amazing cyclical regularity from the 1870s to the 1970s. It is because of its literature and poetry that the Ukrainian language has come to the present-day younger generations, not just preserved but as rich, complex, and supple as it ever was. Poetry is the pioneer of language, since it is by its every essence the art of naming, destined to explore vague and blurred feelings and bring them to the light of consciousness. It is exactly what makes poetry, as T. S. Eliot put it, the most stubbornly national of all arts. In his words, "a thought expressed in a different language may be practically the same thought, but a feeling or emotion expressed in a different language is not the same feeling or emotion." He continues, "a people may have its language taken away from it, suppressed, and another language compelled upon the schools; but unless you teach that people to *feel* in a new language, you have not eradicated the old one, and it will reappear in poetry, which is the vehicle of feeling." This is exactly what took place in Ukraine. For people to feel in a language different than their own, is tantamount to their taking on a different collective unconsciousness. The Ukrainian literati, as the guardians of a language, were thus the only real supporters and promoters of Ukrainian national identity.

I am intentionally omitting the very complicated matters of varieties of styles, of trends and schools of literature, instead concentrating on the general silhouette of Ukrainian literature against the backdrop of history, or rather of non-history, anti-history. It seems quite natural, then, that of all the intellectuals, it was the writers who appeared to be the most sensitive to the violent distortions inflicted upon Ukrainian identity, not only because sensitivity is part of the writer's make-up but also because it is the writers who tended to feel traumatically trapped. Writing in an endangered language is very much akin to being a masochistic occupation. Osip Mandelstam was absolutely right when he said that a poem never demands an immediate interlocutor; what it does demand is a providential interlocutor who could appear at any time, even decades or centuries after the poem has been created. That is God's truth, that you can hardly write without being confident deep in your heart that someday your message will reach its audience, like a letter placed into a bottle and cast into the sea of time.

Imagine that the very language you write in is officially condemned by Party doctrine to become extinct in two or three generations, that you are watching it being extinguished and gradually replaced by Russian in most spheres of culture. As Khrushchev claimed, with his irresistibly charming candor, "The sooner we all start speaking Russian, the sooner Communism will be built." But how can you reconcile the act of writing with the awareness that in the not-too-distant future your message

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will become completely incomprehensible for posterity, with the exception of a handful of stodgy scholars who will approach it as if it were an ancient Hittite manuscript? How can you write bereft of the insurance of time, of the hope that your message has a chance of finding a providential interlocutor, casting your bottle not in the sea but in the sand? This is the problem that has loomed over the Ukrainian literary mentality until just this past year, a problem our counterparts in neighboring European cultures have not had to face. It perhaps explains why writers were the first to start the velvet revolution in Ukraine that finally led to the formation of an independent state.

In 1989, it was the writers who initiated the popular mass movement of Rukh, who, without any special political skills or training, succeeded in uniting all the democratically oriented elements of Ukrainian society around the Rukh platform. It may have been the last manifestation of that charisma that so appealed to writers' audiences through the centuries. Today, the Ukrainian parliament boasts perhaps the greatest number of writer-parliamentarians in the world. It could be called the "Vaclav Havel phenomenon"; an even more apt analogy is the 1916 Irish Easter Uprising, five of whose six leaders were poets.

Yet must the expression of this sense of responsibility, which finally compelled most of the recognized Ukrainian writers to be swallowed up by the leviathan of political activism, necessarily determine the artistic worth of a writer's work? Must it be the evaluative criteria by which a work is judged? The answer to this question can be found in the posthumous fate of the works of Vasyl Stus, without doubt the greatest postwar Ukrainian poet. Imprisoned under Brezhnev, Stus died in 1985 in a prison camp on a hunger strike – nearly half a year after Gorbachev came to power. It is significant that the immediate evidence used to convict Stus was the doctoral dissertation that he wrote on Pavla Tychyna, the remarkable talented poet of the 1920s who, in Tychyna's words, preferred to "kiss the Pope's [i.e. Stalin's] slipper" during the traumatic 1930s. Tychyna adjusted to the demands of the doctrine of socialist realism and joined the ranks of the Soviet literary establishment. He paid for the capitulation of his conscience with the loss of his own poetic voice. From the 1930s onward, he was never able to produce anything but drumming limericks eulogizing the Communist Party, the Young Pioneers, collective farms, the genius of Stalin. Thus it was that for revealing the intrinsic and intimate mechanism of degradation of another poet's "captive mind," Stus received five years of harsh prison camp regime and five years of exile.

Today, we witness a kind of Stus cult. He is worshipped as a hero-poet, to use Thomas Carlyle's term. The collection of Stus's poems, published in Ukraine a few years ago in an edition of 40,000 copies, dis-

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appeared overnight from bookstore shelves. In Kiev, one bookstore manager had to call the mounted police to disperse the agitated crowd demanding copies. Pictures of Stus are seen everywhere – on posters, badges, bumper stickers, T-shirts. It is always the same photo: Stus in exile, standing behind a barbed-wire fence with a firm jaw and invincibly burning eyes, the embodied nightmare of Kundera's heroine in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. One might say that every cult produces its own icons and in the end tends to turn everything into kitsch. Yet surprisingly enough, not a single book concerning Stus's work itself has appeared in print. His poetics, to be sure, are sophisticated, visionary and mystical, possessing a sort of magical clairvoyance. (At an early stage, he was greatly influenced by Rilke, whom he translated into Ukrainian.) But in any case, the dazzling halo of martyrdom has thoroughly overshadowed the poetic text. It is no longer the poetry but the personality of the poet that interests the audience. This is the price literature has to pay for its forced participation in the making of national history.

Paradoxical as it might sound after conjuring the throngs struggling for a slim volume of poetry, literature bears also the problem of loneliness, one which the literature of Ukraine shares with that of other East European countries. Literature can hardly survive without the mirror of an external public response, whatever it may be. Until recently in Eastern Europe, it was the state that held up the mirror to literature. The criteria of literary values were forged within the tense counterposition of literature against the state. Not only social values but the very artistic qualities of a literary work were, to a considerable extent, verified by the hostility it provoked from the authorities. Perhaps there is a grain of truth in the Ukrainian myth that the devil possesses good taste. Now, with the mirror gone, Ukrainian literature is face to face with the bare wall of aloofness separating it from the larger world of literature. Until now, the relationship of Ukrainian literature to the major literature of the rest of the world, including that of Poland and Russia, has been characterized according to the witty formula of the Yiddish author Jacob Gladstein, who, when asked what the difference was between major and minor literature, replied, "I have to read T. S. Eliot, but he doesn't have to read me."

So-called minor literatures then, must try all the harder to have their voices heard. They must acquire additional cultural codes in order to communicate with their more fortunate Western counterparts. It is probably because of this extended amplitude of voice that Ukrainian literature has survived, amassing vigor and vitality. Despite all the obstacles it has faced, it has made possible the rise of the innovative "new wave" generation, greatly inspired by the tectonic fracture of history – and the Yeatsian "terrible beauty" born under it. Nevertheless, the yearning for

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dialogue still remains in the literary mentality. It may be that this longing is a remote reverberation of our transition from nonhistoricalness to history. After all, when you return to consciousness after a prolonged coma, you need desperately to be recognized by other people – in order to be sure that you do exist.

Charles Russell: Thank you, and once again, thank you all for being with us today. We will adjourn to the Newark Museum, which is just three blocks away, for a reception, and we invite you to join us there, to continue the discussions we've had here.

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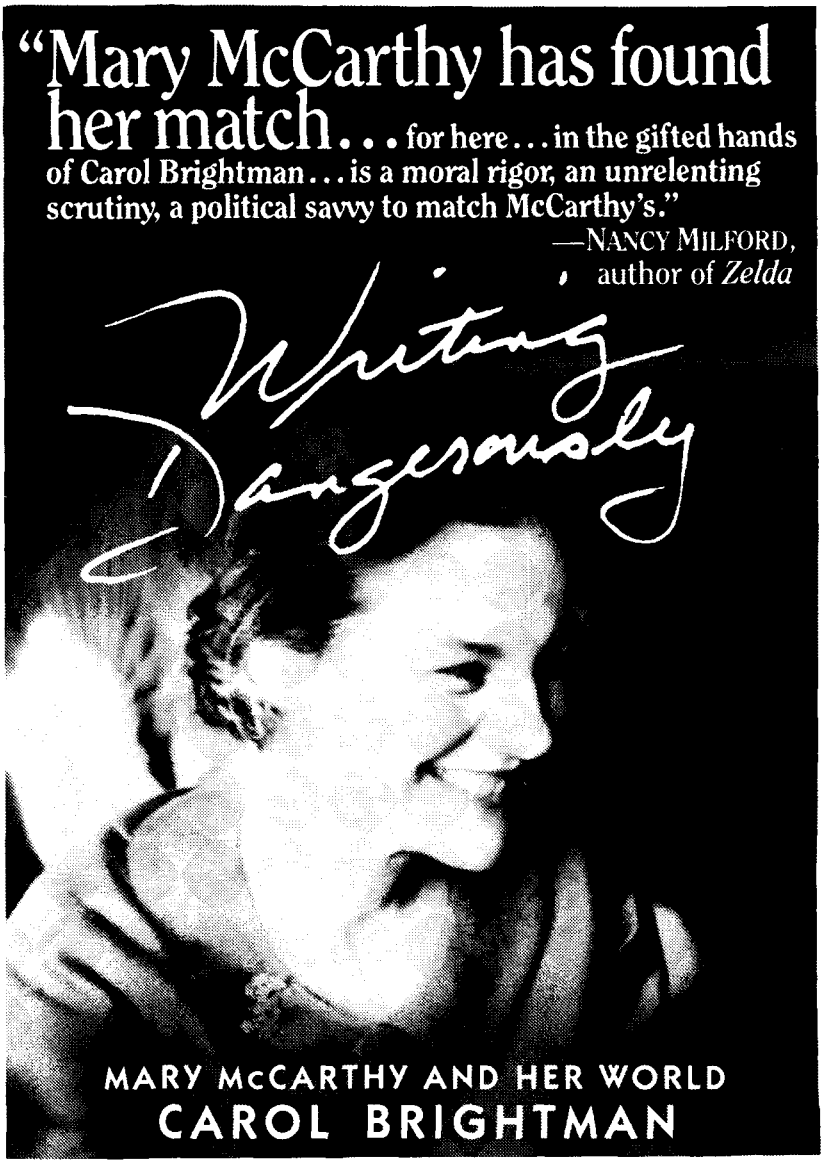

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The Literary Impact of the American and French Revolutions

Susan Sontag: As usual, the announced topic of the session will be interpreted in a very broad way. We have with us Vassily Aksyonov, Vladimir Tismaneanu, and Adam Michnik. I'll speak after them, and then we'll have some debate and contributions from the audience. First, Vassily Aksyonov.

Vassily Aksyonov: In my remarks, I am going to move the emphasis of our panel, the subject of which is the impact on writers of the revolutions that have occurred, from the plural to the singular, to the effect of these revolutions on myself as a writer. I have been most impressed by the human factor at work in the anti-Bolshevik revolutions, by the way that old phraseology and formulations have collided with new ways of thinking.

"There is an opinion, comrades . . . " In this way, Leonid Brezhnev used to sum up the ruling Politburo's sessions. "There is an opinion, comrades . . . " used to be what any regional secretary, or factory director, or ship captain, or military commander would declare during the innumerable meetings taking place throughout the USSR. "There is an opinion . . . " preceded any proposal to increase industrial production, or to deprive a dissident of his constitutional rights and citizenship, or to improve the Marxist education of the masses, or to challenge the imperialists in Africa. "There is an opinion . . . " was an indispensable part of the Soviet Communist Party's phraseology. Boris Yeltsin, as he was approaching his presidential inauguration ceremony, said to a group of his close friends: "There is an opinion that I should pledge allegiance to the country with my hand on the Bible. Personally, I love this idea; however, I'm afraid it is still a bit premature." So, he pledged allegiance with his hand on his heart; meanwhile, the object in question, the Holy Bible, was humbly put on the table in front of him. In this episode, I believe, a striking paradox of our time was reflected: the old phraseology encountered a breathtakingly new content.

The collapse of the Communist world has given us some examples of the highest drama, showing unthinkable turns in the people's fate. History selected completely unexpected individuals to lead the process: Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, and finally Boris Yeltsin. Still, an underlying logic might be found in those selections, the logic of a crumbling utopian

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mythology. Walesa represented the working class, which, it turned out, rebelled against its own proclaimed dictatorship. Havel proved to be the epitome of the resisting artists and intellectuals, a stratum which has never been honored with the designation "class," but regarded only as a "layer" between workers and peasants, a symbol of those people whose stamina has been always underestimated by the rulers. As far as Boris Yeltsin is concerned, he ascended to his supreme position from the lower depths of the high Party hierarchy. In other words, he represented the ultimate corrosion: the uprising of the rulers against their own rule. These three people's faces, their gaits, their inner gestures still speak about their past, even though they belong to the brave new world.

Today, some people inside and outside the former Soviet Union are dissatisfied with the democratic regime, because they see quite a few *apparatchiks* of the old structures within the ranks of the new government. Yet this was unavoidable, considering the proportions of this historically unprecedented upheaval, of this gigantic, tectonic shift. It was a virtually bloodless upheaval, featuring the most fantastic, maybe even mystic design of a genuine spiritual revolution. All of our lives, if we ever dreamed of the demise of totalitarian Communism, it was assumed that the monster would never surrender without a devastating fight, horrible casualties, scorched cities. Then the wildest dreams of my generation of Russians came true. The *putsch* has taken place, and at the dawn of the total collapse of the Communist party, only three lives had been lost. Russia was miraculously given a chance to solve its problems in peace, without a bloodbath, as though Providence had decided, "They've had enough."

The Communist Party devoured itself from the inside out. First, it outgrew its logical proportions. In order to act properly, the Communist or Fascist parties must know their limits. They must comply with the meaning of "fascista," a bundle of closely-tied, springy twigs. Glorifying the Party, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky once said: "The Party is a million-fingered hand clenched in one crushing fist!" A million fingers was probably the limit. Having twenty-five million "fingers," that is, ten percent of the entire population within its grasp, the Party was inadvertently transformed into a multitude of hands grabbing in all directions.

In fact, the Party turned into a sort of self-promoters' club. One virtually could not pursue a substantial career without having a Party member's card. One could not be promoted to the position of, say, a theater's artistic director, or a magazine's editor-in-chief, or a chairman of a collective farm, or a construction manager, or a laboratory director, or a fishing boat captain – without joining the one and only Party. Once, shortly after I became a member of the Writers' Union, I was offered a further promotion, membership in the Party. I politely turned it

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down, saying that I simply couldn't accept the honor, since I was not an atheist. "You're not who?" asked the person of consequence who wanted to give me this promotion. "Well, isn't scientific atheism one of the major requirements for entering the Communist Party?" asked I. He looked at me as if I were a lunatic: What is this young fool talking about?

Somehow or other, we must admit that those who wanted to climb the ladder of success, that most active segment of the population of the country known as the Soviet Union, carried the CPSU's membership cards. Some did it cynically, others simply took it for granted. A handful of dissidents challenged the system openly, but there were millions and millions of Party members whose souls, year by year, became impregnated with discontent, disappointment, bitterness, and despair. The seeds of this unique revolution of the presumed rulers against their own rule were sown and grew in these souls. That's why they so easily, or with a sense of great relief, parted with their Party membership cards, getting rid of the ever-poisoning falsity of their lives. Yet how could the nation now do without all those millions, without all those artistic directors, editors, managers, captains, scientists, scholars, engineers? Their names are legion! A new generation, free of the falsity their predecessors were compelled to live with, hasn't yet come of age. Perhaps it is a great blessing for the nation that people don't want to get even with the Communists. Perhaps the simple fact that the vast majority of the population, formally or informally, were themselves Communists has saved the great nation from a bloodthirsty vengeance and has provided this new Russian revolution with its unique, self-liberating character. It does help that everyone has a sense of guilt.

On the other hand, we cannot ignore the alarming signals and bitter sense of dissatisfaction now emanating from the former Soviet Union. It is being said that the same Communist *apparatchiks* have become more and more conspicuous in the new democratic regime. Old stooges are repainting themselves in new colors. They are reconstructing the old, familiar glossary and phraseology so as to pose as democrats, and at the same time, they are taking pains to restore the old system of privileges and the omnipresence of a reconstructed KGB. The sycophants were always in high demand in Russia, and there certainly was always a good supply of them. So Yeltsin's government deserves credit for selecting and establishing those new people in its ranks that it has, and Moscow is still the indisputable champion of democracy among the other capitals of the former Soviet Union.

On the other hand, one cannot rule out that even this government, especially in such areas as diplomacy or the secret services, is not immune

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from penetration by overly cynical old *apparatchiks* or nationalist fascists in various forms of disguise. Everything – an individual's intellect, experiences, former activities – must be taken into account in the complex business of selecting cadres, but in my opinion the first priority, under the current circumstances, must be given to moral standards. Politics in any country is not an immaculate business. Russia, after seventy-four years under the most immoral power ever, certainly has to take into account its own dramatic shortage of morality. For there really is a moral difference between Boris Yeltsin's having jumped off the Communist bandwagon and Leonid Kravchuk's having done so later. Under these circumstances, I believe, the people should openly discuss moral standards, honesty and dishonesty, the old, good values which this or that individual managed to preserve or managed to betray. It will still take the younger generation a long time to replace those who were, on this or that level, involved in the secret KGB cobweb of informants or in the disinformation service. Distinctions among the extent of individuals' involvement in the past will have to be made. Some people in Russia appeal for a total general repentance and purging; others say that this would be a most horrible disaster that would split the nation into ever-feuding camps. Some prudently keep silent on the matter.

Yet somehow or other, those former professional agents of disinformation, like Georgi Arbatov or Vladimir Posner, do seem ridiculous wearing the togas of the new democrats, publishing their books of memoirs in the United States. In a country with a free press – and I daresay the Russian press today is probably the freest in the world – everything will be gradually discovered, everything will finally be said. This process is already underway. Day in and day out, we discover more and more shameful facts, either about high priests of the Orthodox church, or about literary personalities who worked abroad under "the KGB orientation." Wouldn't it be more productive for the majority of them to repent and reevaluate their lives without waiting to be exposed? I have a certain respect for those big shots of the past who found the courage to give up and who have adjusted themselves to the rapidly changing conditions.

Lately, I came across a story of a former Commander-in-Chief of the Black Sea Fleet, Admiral Khronopula. Forced to resign after last August's *coup d'etat*, he managed not to plunge into depression, but started brewing beer in his native Sevastopol. No doubt he told himself: "There is an opinion, comrades, that the brewery production must be increased!" Thinking about Admiral Khronopula, a Greek by origin, led me to my shelf of Harvard Classics, where I opened a volume at random to

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Aristophanes's comedy, *The Frogs*. My eyes were drawn to reading these lines:

> Often has it crossed my fancy, that the city loves to deal
> With the very best and noblest members of her commonweal,
> Just as with our ancient coinage, and the newly minted gold.
> Yea, for these, our sterling pieces, all of pure Athenian mold,
> All of perfect die and metal, all the fairest of the fair,
> All of workmanship unequalled, proved and valued everywhere
> Both amongst our own Hellenes and Barbarians far away,
> These we use not: but the worthless pinchbeck coins of yesterday,
> Vilest die and basest metal, now we always use instead.
> Even so, our sterling townsmen, nobly born and nobly bred,
> Men of worth and rank and mettle, men of honorable fame,
> Trained in every liberal science, choral dance and manly game,
> These we treat with scorn and insult, but the strangers newest come,
> Worthless sons of worthless fathers, pinchbeck townsmen, yellow scum,
> Whom in earlier days the city hardly would have stopped to use
> Even for her scapegoat victims, these for every task we choose.
> O unwise and foolish people, yet to mend your ways begin;
> Use again the good and useful; so hereafter, if ye win
> 'Twill be due to this your wisdom: if ye fall, at least 'twill be
> Not a fall that brings dishonor, falling from a worthy tree.

Well, it's not all Greek to me at all.

Susan Sontag: Thank you. Now, Vladimir Tismaneanu.

Vladimir Tismaneanu: My remarks are titled, "Winners or Losers: The Moral Dilemmas of the East European Intellectuals." For more than four decades, East European intellectuals could be described as belonging in a peculiar sociological and political category. They shared characteristics that made them distinct from their peers in the West: affirming the existence of moral values, reluctant to endorse utopian radicalism, and even rejecting collectivism in any of its varieties. In many cases, politics as such was regarded as a degrading exercise in hypocrisy. I speak here, of course, of the idealized type of critical intellectual and not of the Party-controlled stratum of ideological mandarins. Although the status of the intelligentsia under Communism was ambiguous and its role controversial and often disputed, it was given a privileged position in the monopolistic and all-embracing pretense of official doctrine in Eastern and Central Europe. Perhaps because of the ambiguous nature of the intellectual under Communism, intellectuals appear to have played a vital role in the

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demolition of the old governing structures, in the denunciation of the spurious legitimacy of the Leninist regimes, and in the strategic imagining of an emancipated territory of free communication.

As Vassily Aksyonov pointed out, because the ruling bureaucracies saw themselves as exponents of the working class, intellectuals were regarded as a stratum or layer, and deprived therefore of the characteristics of class and the right to partake of power. Yet intellectuals were expected to participate in the preservation of the ideological domination and self-reproduction of the status quo. Opportunism, conformity, and regimentation were generously rewarded; a whole apparatus was created to construct a parasitical stratum of ideological priests. But despite the oxymoronic nature of the intellectual under Communism, the overall political and social dereliction impelled many average citizens to look among the intellectuals for moral examples. Many intellectuals led the efforts to articulate the discourse of opposition. At the moment in 1989 when the Communist regimes were collapsing, the prevailing attitude in these countries toward the critical intelligentsia was one of sympathy and even admiration. Three years later, intellectuals seem to have lost much of their moral aura and are often attacked as champions of futility, architects of disaster, and incorrigible daydreamers. Their status is extremely precarious precisely because they symbolize the principle of difference that neo-authoritarian politics tends to suppress.

Confronted with the duplicity of the prevailing dogma, intellectuals were the first to experience the disenchantment with the Marxist utopia. In the 1950s and early 1960s, intellectuals' engagement with the hermeneutics of subversion served to dispel the mystical veneer of the Marxist *gnosis*. Dissent meant, among other things, to break with the alleged cognitive infallibility of the ruling elite; to search for different sources of rationality and legitimacy. The ethos of the dissident movements was linked to the rediscovery of the centrality of truth and freedom as the essential values of political discourse itself. The writings of intellectuals like Leszek Kolakowski, George Konrad, Vaclav Havel, Janos Kis, Agnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, and Adam Michnik subjected the Jacobin-Bolshevik cult of reason (including the celebration of *raison d'état* or *raison de parti*) to a consistent critique.

Reflecting on the totalitarian experience, these critical intellectuals realized that the original sin, the beginning of the oracular creed that affirmed the omnipotence of reason and the exacerbation of statism, within the Kafkaesque universe of bureaucratic socialism, could not be disassociated from the legacy of the French Revolution. They perceived secular prophesies, the infinite arrogance of illuminated sects that believed in their providential right to impose limits on human freedom in the

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name of liberty, to be the ideological underpinnings of both overt and covert state terrorism. Interrogating the foundations of the status quo, these intellectuals were often interrogated by the police. They rehabilitated the political significance of doubt and demonstrated that the official celebration of humanism was nothing but the camouflage of barbarism. They rediscovered and internalized the values of individualism expressed in the tradition begun with the American Revolution. State socialism proclaimed the rights of totality, the supremacy of collectivism, and the obligation of the individual to accept this *diktat* of monistic determinism, codified by the agitprop bureaucrats. At the opposite pole, the advocates of the powerless insisted that only freedom can be the foundation of power in a rational community of autonomous individuals.

The phenomenology of political awakening in Eastern and Central Europe created a special status for intellectuals. They were made to feel important and irreplaceable. To those less politically active members of society, they were role models and truth-tellers. This explains the preeminent roles given to Andrei Sakharov, Vaclav Havel, Zhelyu Zhelev, Miklos Haraszti, Janos Kis, and others who, under less demanding circumstances, would not have become educators of the polis. In different countries, they were nevertheless in similar positions in the struggle against similar systems. In order to remain loyal to their critical mission, they had to adopt an adversarial attitude. Their discourse enabled emancipation to the extent that it debunked the prevailing lie and invited people to live in truth. Their vision of politics was fundamentally anti-political, that is, anti-Machiavellian. They rejected the logic of acquiescence and proposed instead a logic of sedition and liberation. While the system tried to penetrate all aspects of life with its ideological tentacles, the critical intellectuals offered an alternative vision, distrustful of any ultimate truth except that of freedom. They played a dangerous game; they paid with time in prison; yet eventually their efforts were repaid in support from the populace.

So it is understandable that during the first stage of post-Communism the masses applauded the intellectuals and appointed or elected many of them to leading positions. The intellectuals' skepticism about politics was overcome by their feeling of duty to perform public service. In Hungary, Janos Kis became chairman of the Alliance of Free Democrats; Gaspar Miklos Tamas served as a member of the parliament, as did Andrei Sakharov, in the former Soviet Union. For Vaclav Havel to have become president of his country seemed natural.

Now, however, politics in East and Central Europe has entered a different stage, creating new challenges for intellectuals. The old division

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between "them" and "us" has been replaced by more specific tensions. Liberalism is attacked from the extreme right and the extreme left, leaving the intellectuals increasingly isolated. For example, when the members of the Group for Social Dialogue in Romania tried to bring about the demystification of the country's political traditions, including problems involving the political history of the Second World War, they were attacked as (I quote from official publications) "being enemies of the nation, rootless cosmopolitans without any understanding of the genuine interests of the national community." Those intellectuals who have advocated Europeanism and the necessity of "spiritualizing" political borders have been reprimanded for their lack of national identity. An increasingly disaffected population dismisses their views on freedom as speculative and abstract. The same dissidents who yesterday were lionized are today seen as "subliminal leftists." (It should be noted that, as in Hungary and Romania, a number of these scurrilous attacks appear in the pages of government-linked publications.) Most disturbing of all, those who most vociferously denounce the intellectuals are those people who did not do anything to defy the continuum of domination during the times of Communist dictatorship.

The intellectuals themselves tend to divide along traditional lines: there are some who favor liberal values, which embody ideas of diversity, particularism, difference, tolerance, and protection for all minorities. There are others who are tempted to exalt collective nouns like *fatherland*, *nation*, *church*, and *tradition*. Some intellectuals do remain faithful to the dissident creed that the alpha and omega of a free public space is represented by the autonomy of the individual. They support an inclusive vision of the nation based on a post-traditional identity (which Jürgen Habermas once called constitutional patriotism). Others think that organic roots and ethnic-historical or even racial bonds are at least as important as the idea of an idealistic, Kantian community based on civic and moral values. The old conflict between Westernizers and populists has reemerged in all these countries, as a growing chasm between liberal and illiberal trends. As the idealization of the pre-Communist past tends to become contagious, the liberal intellectuals are the ones who remind their fellow countrymen that these new mythologies cannot lead to anything but the obfuscation of truth and to new disasters. Doing so, they provoke the ire of ethnocentric zealots – often recruited among the former Stalinists – who accuse them, as was done during the previous regime, of "disturbing the peace." The role intellectuals played in the struggle against Communism is often forgotten in the rising light of the new political and managerial class that includes a high percentage of speculators, profiteers, and social climbers.

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This spectacle is sometimes dismaying: one sees former secret police members posturing as born-again democrats; judges appointed under Communist rule still practicing and calling for the persecution of the former dissidents, as we have seen already in Czechoslovakia; central-planning barons and Leninist propagandists converted into bankers and yellow press tycoons, like Jerzy Urban, for instance, in Poland.

Critical intellectuals in these countries are now faced with the threat of a new marginality. Their former centrality originated from their moral standing: they were the jesters in the Marxist court, the embodiment of the negative principle, the eternally restive element that broke the frozen rules of the game. Communism tried to absorb and contain this seditious dimension, to impose censorship and self-censorship. But as Miklos Haraszti wrote in *The Velvet Prison*, critical intellectuals could rescue their dignity in the roles of the maverick artist and the naive hero. There is little room for these two postures in the often insensitive and brutal world of post-Communism.

The marketization of culture and the abolition of state subsidies for the arts has left the intellectuals in a state of material despondency and moral siege. They do not know exactly what to fight for; if they do know, they wonder whether the cause is worth suffering for. A recent example is the case of Dan Petrescu, a Romanian writer who defied the Ceausescu regime. He was the brother-in-law of the assassinated Professor Ioan Petru Culianu from the University of Chicago, who happened to be a friend of "ours," the people who were involved in the antidictatorial, anti-Communist work in Romania. Dan Petrescu was involved in the Romanian anti-Ceausescu movement; when he was under house arrest, he wrote a number of texts that appeared in the French media, primarily in *Libération*. He was a member of the Group for Social Dialogue. After the revolution, he became a deputy minister of culture, only to be slandered in a most vicious way by the Stalino-fascist press. Petrescu resigned, and in a series of articles published in the independent weekly *Contrapunct* he spelled out his outrage and his disgust with the viciousness of the mass instincts set free by the collapse of tyranny.

As Vaclav Havel recently noted in the pages of the *New York Review of Books*, the ultimate reference point in the post-Communist political climate of widespread cynicism, hatred, and intolerance is still to be found in the anti-political search for a life in truth. Once again, intellectuals are in an ambivalent position. They were the ones who spearheaded the struggle against mythocratic Communism. They dispelled the system's self-serving nimbus and initiated a moral quest for truth that convinced many to risk their lives and take to the streets. They contributed de-

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cisively to the disintegration of the elite's self-confidence. It might be said that the intellectuals were the gravediggers of institutionalized Marxism. Their anti-authoritarianism and rejection of utopian paradigms generated a political style based on trust and dialogue that helped the revolutions avoid violence and bloodshed. Now, their merits are being questioned by individuals with no oppositional history, whose unique credentials are that they know how to take advantage of bandwagon opportunities.

The fact that the critical intelligentsia embraced an individualistic ethos, rather than an egalitarian-collectivistic one, influenced to a great extent the democratic orientation of the revolutionary changes. The intellectuals of the intelligentsia assumed that by detecting the pitfalls of Marxist historicism and its totalitarian potential, they had annulled the seductive factors in all ideologies. This, it turns out, was an illusion. In the post-Communist world, many people are attracted by inchoate and often dangerous authoritarian creeds. We see doctrines emerging that are linked to racism, rabid nationalism, and social corporatism. Do intellectuals still matter in the post-Communist political world? Or is Leszek Kolakowski correct when he observes in *Modernity on Endless Trial* that the intelligentsia's disillusionment with redemptive-apocalyptical teleologies has led it to retreat from taking prophetic stands? Kolakowski notes:

> There is much less willingness to offer unconditional support to existing ideologies and more inclination to keep a distance from political matters, with a consequent tendency to withdraw into more secured and specialized areas. As a result we probably now have fewer influential lunatics and swindlers, but also fewer intellectual teachers.

Personally, I believe that intellectuals do have an opportunity to be directly involved in the reshaping of the public sphere in these countries. The current debates, primarily the attempts at historical revisionism and ethnic scapegoating, offer to intellectuals a vital role as civic pedagogues. They approach today's disquieting situations armed with their own four decades' experience of humiliations, self-flagellations, and moral resurrections. They come as propagators of the unconventional wisdom, as taboo-breakers and practitioners of a different political art.

For as long as there is no political class, as long as political parties are unable to formulate distinct interests in the light of distinct ideologies, intellectuals will still be needed to continue the democratic transition. Their awareness of their own indispensability explains why Havel still lives in Hradcany Castle and why Nicolae Manolescu, Romania's foremost literary critic and head of the Civic Alliance Party, decided to

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run for president. It is because critical intellectuals did so much to preserve the values of free communication that they cannot simply resign and leave the public sphere to the adventurers, Mafiosi, and charlatans. It is true that this commitment to politics entails that intellectuals become professionalized, that some of them may have to renounce the time devoted to aesthetic creation. But is this sacrifice any less worthwhile than the ones intellectuals made during the old regimes?

It is essential that intellectuals be critical of the moral derailments jeopardizing the fledgling democracies. They are the ones who suffered most dramatically the consequences of limitations of basic freedoms, primarily freedom of information and expression, and there is no reason to think that they will forget so easily the price they paid for these deprivations. Avoiding the temptation of self-glorification, intellectuals will also have to avoid indulging in self-induced sentiments of historical impotence. While not all-powerful, liberal intellectuals in post-Communist regimes do remain the repository of democratic hope. They are the ones who can prevent the slide into tribalistic excesses and remind their fellow citizens that the revolutions of 1989 were not made in order to create new penitentiaries for free thinkers. Neither completely winners or losers, intellectuals can help prevent the degeneration of the democratic revolutions into a massive struggle for settling old scores, for the lynchings and grotesque masquerading of mob enthusiasm. It is too early to write the obituary of Eastern Europe's critical intelligentsia. Without its members, the glorious revolutions of 1989 would have been less glorious. Their abdication would seriously damage democracy's chances in a region still plagued with atavistic resentments and premodern anguishes.

Susan Sontag: Thank you. Adam Michnik.

Adam Michnik: From a uniquely Polish perspective, the American and French Revolutions appear as two distinct ways of experiencing freedom. Through this lens, the American Revolution appears to embody simply an idea of freedom without utopia. Following Thomas Paine, it is based upon the natural right of people to determine their own fate. It consciously relinquishes the utopian vision of a perfect, conflict-free society in favor of one based upon equal opportunity, equality before the law, religious freedom, and the rule of law. From the American Revolution also comes the idea of a plurality of exiles. The Revolution was fought by people who had tasted the bitterness of humiliation and servitude. And it brought about a republic of people who have become conscious creators of their own destinies. We see in America the embodiment of the principle of an open society and an open nation. We must remem-

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ber, however, that this ideal was long compromised by reality: this republic of free people tolerated slavery for many decades.

The French Revolution, in contrast, has left us an intrinsically ambiguous legacy. It was the embodiment of Montesquieu's notion of a triple division of power and of the rule of law: all that is not forbidden by law is allowed. At the same time, this revolution translated the glorious vision of freedom, equality, and fraternity into a language of utopia in which the cult of reason, guarded by the Jacobin Terror, would replace the dictatorship of Church doctrine. Thanks to the Jacobins, the Declaration of the Rights of Man – the monument of Europe's democratic culture – has been forever linked to the shadow of the guillotine – the symbol of revolutionary terror. The French Revolution thus leaves us a dual legacy: it is to us a source of freedom but also represents that first fit of the madness of boundless reason. Because of this madness, the French Revolution and the Terror were followed by Bonapartism and then by the triumphant Restoration. The French Revolution gave birth to both the principles of human rights and the Jacobin Terror of Robespierre and Saint-Just; it gave us Thermidor as well as Bonapartism. It also gave rise to De Maistre, the classic defender of counter-revolutionary terror. The French Revolution declared war on God in the name of freedom. But whoever wishes to destroy God in the name of freedom elevates to power either the devil wearing the mask of a Saint-Just or the executioner glorified by De Maistre.

I am a Pole. I look at the tradition of anti-feudal revolution from the perspective of a man who came to spend most of his life rebelling against Communist dictatorship. What was Communism? It was a temptation and an illusion. It was the temptation to participate in the great cause of social justice, and it was the illusion of bringing about a world in which the powerless could control their own fate. Communism was based on the illusory Promethean hope of stealing from the gods the secret of the universe and creating thereby a world based on equality, justice, and true universal values. Communism believed it had deciphered the hidden meaning and the end of history. In practice, it was but an intimate union of violence and lies.

How did the opposition to Communist dictatorship take shape? The first phase of the rebellion against Communism was "revisionism," the critique of Communist practice from within the Communist value system. To paraphrase the Polish philosopher Stanislaw Brzozowski, one might say that this movement was the rebellion of the flower against its roots. The second phase of the anti-Communist opposition was metaphysical critique, which, while attacking Communism's deceptive facade, simultaneously rejected the Communist principle of total control over

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individuals. The first phase of the opposition saw a struggle of reason against the irrational; the second was founded on a defense of natural law against the claims of boundless reason. Was this rebellion a revolution or a counter-revolution? Whatever it was, it appealed to values rooted in the American rather than the French Revolution. At the same time, there has always existed a small but serious trend which criticized Communism in the name of Communism, best exemplified by Leon Trotsky's *Revolution Betrayed*.

The entire actual anti-Communist opposition, represented by KOR, Solidarity, Sakharov, Solzhenitsyn, Charter 77, and the Hungarian intellectual resistance, all appealed to the idea of human rights and to the principle of natural law which was, in turn, rooted in religious tradition. One could say that Poland's leading intellectuals – Gombrowicz and Milosz, Kolakowski and Herbert, Cardinal Wyszynski and Cardinal Wojtyla – consistently articulated their opposition to Communism in anti-utopian terms. While not always agreeing upon the definition of normality, they repudiated the absurd in the name of normality. What was common to the entire opposition? I do not think it was the spirit of the French Revolution expressed by the Jacobin principle, "Be my brother or I'll kill you." It was rather the spirit of the American Revolution, the spirit of freedom founded on law, on diversity guaranteed by equality of all religions, and on the deeply-rooted right of private property, a right protected against the all-powerful claims of the state.

Today, certain elements of utopian and doctrinal thinking are resurfacing in this strange post-Communist era. This is an era whose sense we can no more grasp than Jonah could comprehend the interior of the whale. But let us try to name some of these new utopias. First, there is the peculiar new syndrome combining populism with an authoritarian temptation, xenophobic nationalism with religious fundamentalism. We have here the ideal of a nationalistic Catholic Polish state. Such a state would be founded on privileges granted to the Catholic Church and on legislating Catholic principles into the law of the land. In such a society, only racially pure Poles could obtain citizenship; for only the racially pure Pole could be considered a real Catholic, and only the faithful and obedient Catholic could be a real Pole.

The utopia of the racially pure state, however, can assume a variety of forms. As old Vladimir Lenin might have said, we need to distinguish between the nationalisms of large and small nations. A large nation is one that, even at times of the worst oppression, has never felt that its very existence was in jeopardy. Not for a moment have Russians or Serbs suspected that they might be forced to relinquish their national identity.

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The nationalism of a large nation may take two forms: either the aggressive-xenophobic form or the liberal-imperialistic form. The aggressive-xenophobic form finds expression in slogans like "Russia for the Russians," or "Serbia for the Serbs." Thus, for example, an aggressive Russian chauvinist would disqualify both Osip Mandelstam and Joseph Brodsky from the ranks of true Russians, not only because of their national origin, but also and equally because of the liberal-universalist message of their writings. The spirit of the Black Hundreds flows in this aggressive chauvinism, which speaks of a racial ideal embodied in the national history, the true meaning of which can be revealed only to the initiated. Liberal imperialism appears to be the opposite of aggressive chauvinism. It decisively rejects anti-Semitism and all forms of aggressive xenophobia. Propagating the idea of an open society, it remains inclusive. Yet while allowing anyone to be a Russian, it categorically opposes the aspirations of other nations to sovereignty, perceiving such aspirations as ethnic separatism. For a liberal imperialist, anyone may be a Russian: a Ukrainian, an Estonian, a Tartar, an Armenian, even a Jew. However, a Ukrainian who desires to be a Ukrainian, in a sovereign Ukrainian state, will immediately be labeled a "primitive nationalist." Of course, Russians claiming sovereignty for their own state would not apply the "nationalist" label to themselves. No Russian historian has ever referred to such historical events as the Russian struggle for liberation from the Tartar yoke, the Russian uprising against Polish rule in seventeenth-century Moscow, or the Russian resistance against Napoleon and Hitler, as examples of Russian separatism.

The distinction between xenophobic chauvinism and liberal imperialism should not be underestimated. This difference carries an important meaning for the history of Russia, and it defines the very essence of the Russian nation. Yet from the point of view of a small nation, fearing – with good reason – that it will be totally Russified, the distinction may feel trivial. For the past seventy years, the Ukrainian has feared that his national identity was in grave danger. He has feared Russification, the total eradication of his national identity. He has feared the pitfalls of a pan-Slavism that would deny Ukraine its claim to nationhood. He has feared that the world would be convinced – indeed that he himself would be convinced – that Ukraine was only some regional variant of Great Russia, and that the Ukrainian language is but a dialect of the Russian language. While the Russian nation felt itself to be a victim of Bolshevik tyranny, the Ukrainian has felt himself to be a victim of Russian tyranny. The same could be said about the Lithuanian, the Slovenian in Yugoslavia, or the Slovak in Czechoslovakia.

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The tragedy of a small nation lies not only in its precarious position but also in a certain type of national self-perception. A Ukrainian defines his or her identity in the language of ethnic, cultural, and religious difference. This is why small nations, when freed from an immediate threat, cannot immediately shed this specific psychological state. Gaining independence, a small nation is not able to treat the minorities and dissidents within its borders in a liberal-imperialistic manner. The great poet of Lithuania, Thomas Venclova, seemed to have been right when he said:

> We dreamt of the end of the great prison, but we cannot be sure that when it falls apart it will not merely become a plethora of small cells in which each nation remains imprisoned by its own blindness and by the single-minded pursuit of self-interest.*

The present situation of the Ossetians in Georgia best illustrates how easily a liberating nationalism can change into an oppressive one.

Poland's situation is unique. It is perhaps the only state in the region that is simultaneously a large and a small nation. It is small in relation to Russia or Germany, and large in relation to Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belorussia. This dual identity is evident in Polish public opinion: When speaking of the German minority in Poland, the Poles stress the sovereignty of the Polish state and reject the idea of any foreign interference in this matter. About the Polish minority in Lithuania, however, one hear endless appeals in Poland to our Polish government to undertake formal diplomatic steps on its behalf. In relation to Germany, Poland perceives itself as a small nation endangered by German hegemony. In relation to Lithuania, Poland often speaks in a voice in which it would never allow any other nation to speak about Poland. Both examples show how easy it is to evoke conflicts and inflame passions in the name of the ethnic state or the national mystique. And the issues of ethnic minorities, disputed territories, and contentious futures are likely to constantly reheat passions. The future is still questionable. Fukuyama is wrong when he talks about the end of history. Dahrendorf is right when he says that history is just beginning.

The next few years will be marked by a deep conflict between the religious-nationalist fundamentalists and the proponents of the idea of an open society. But the idea of an open society is not the same as the

*These remarks are excerpted from a speech given by Thomas Venclova on the occasion of receipt of an honorary doctorate from the Marie Curie Sklodowska University in Lublin in 1991; they were published in *Zeszyty Literackie* 38, 1992.

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utopia of liberal capitalism. The utopia of liberal capitalism seeks to combine the principle of the free market with the practice of a strong police state. The police dictatorship of General Pinochet combined with the market economics of Milton Friedman is thus supposed to furnish a new model of the road to prosperity. Currently, we see various attempts to tap into populist moods and rhetoric beginning to dominate our public discourse. One could say that the Robespierre of our times has joined with the De Maistre of our times. The Phrygian red cap of the Jacobin becomes part of the executioner's uniform as he beheads the insubordinate to the applause of De Maistre in *Les Soirs de St. Petersburg*.

How can one oppose all this? One can and should, as always, oppose this with Jefferson's and Paine's ideas of the natural rights of people to freedom under the rule of law. For it is freedom within the framework of law that constitutes the essence of democratic order. It is not likely that the long debate over the genesis of totalitarian systems will end soon. There will still be those who see in totalitarianism the triumph of the striving for absolute salvation, the victory of irrationalism and mysticism. And there will be those who view totalitarianism as the triumphant march of reason trampling over the sacred. In other words, while some fear the death of the sacred, others fear the dictatorship imposed in the name of the sacred. What can we say? Above all, that any type of dictatorship will certainly destroy the sacred. "Above all" does not mean exclusively. One can reject the sacred by turning one's back on it, but the sacred cannot be successfully defended by police and dictators.

I am a Pole. In the pantheon of Polish heroes, the highest place is taken by Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a hero of the American Revolution and of the Polish struggle for freedom and independence. Kosciuszko loved freedom, without any Jacobin madness; he loved his nation, without hating anyone. Allow me to say that I, along with my friends, hope this tradition within Polish culture will prevail in our time of democratic transition.

What I have sketched shows only that I do not have much to say concerning the new role of intellectuals in the post-Communist society. I trust that the status of these intellectuals will remain unchanged. The more they are able to resist group phobias, madness, and conformism, the more they will be heeded. The more they reject current fashion and adhere to the truth, the more valiant will be their voices. Intellectuals must remain what they have always been: a nail in the shoe of "normal" society.

Marina Tsvetaeva once wrote that because of their peculiar situation, all poets are Jews. Let us borrow her thought. An honest intellectual has to count on being confronted with attacks as brutal and aggressive as

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those of anti-Semites against the Jews. And the honest intellectual may also have to play the role of a scapegoat, the "sacrificial Jew." But to be a Jew is always better than to be an anti-Semite.

Susan Sontag: May I interpose a few remarks about our theme? Most people would now take for granted that the American and French Revolutions are not simply two examples but two poles of revolutionary endeavor. Indeed, this polarity between the American Revolution and the French Revolution became an important *topos* in the discourse of the repudiation of Communism in Europe. To repudiate the Bolshevik Revolution was also to repudiate the French Revolution, of which it was seen as a successor and fulfillment, and to acclaim the American Revolution as a positive model.

I'd like to speak to the American perspective on this question. For many of us, the first consideration of this polarity came through reading contemporary European political philosophers such as Hannah Arendt. It was Arendt who introduced many Americans to the idea that their revolution was truly radical too, as radical in its way as the French Revolution. We may call the events that started in 1776 our "revolution," but I think I am correct in saying that we didn't think it was really a revolution; not a revolution in the same sense as was the French Revolution. It was, first of all, a war of secession. Nothing that happened here seemed as radical as what went on in France, where, in one of its most decisive symbolic acts, the revolution decreed a new calendar, with new names for the months of the year. All the imitations of the French Revolution, such as the short-lived republics in various city-states in Italy, adopted the French civic calendar.

In contrast, the Americans had no need to rename time in order to define their break with the past. We had a new space, and creating a different society in a new space was in itself a revolutionary idea. The notion of emigration, of migration, of making a new society was radical enough; we didn't have to think of a new time. The notion of space superseded that of time. And the American relation to time, both in the form of the past and of the future, is one of the ways in which we as a post-European society are most different from the traditional European societies. We have always had a different, more unforgiving relation to the past, and a different, more optimistic relation to the future.

As for "The Literary Impact of the American and French Revolutions," isn't it significant that all the important literary texts that come to mind deal with the French Revolution? Isn't this because, again, we regard the French Revolution as the real revolution? Think of Carlyle's *The French Revolution*, Büchner's *Danton's Death*, Hugo's *Quatre-vingt-*

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treize, and, for readers of English the single most influential book for shaping our idea of revolution, Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*. And what do all of these books and Büchner's drama say? They say that revolution is a disaster. It is not just in recent decades, as the opinion of the respectable independent intelligentsia in all countries united in condemning the wickedness of the Bolshevik system, that the French Revolution, because of the new legitimacy it gave to the state's recourse to terror and violence, was judged to be a mistake. This has been the near-unanimous judgment of literature since the early nineteenth century. Such judgments seem to assume that the Jacobin extension of the French Revolution was the only reality, that all the rest only lead up to this – that revolution was a phenomenon to be identified with its most radical form. But the French Revolution isn't just its Jacobin phase, as we are often asked to believe. It is worth reminding ourselves that all revolutions, including the French Revolution, are extremely complicated, and it is an error to identify the idea of revolution with Jacobinism.

I also think that one must not take these revolutions at face value. With all due respect to Adam Michnik, I think it is a mistake to say the difference between the French Revolution and the American Revolution is that one had a utopia and the other didn't. There is a utopia, a radical idea in the American Revolution. But, as Ralph Ellison pointed out yesterday, freedom for all was obviously *not* freedom for all. And the idea of a social contract among equals that was the basis of the new idea of citizenship in the French Revolution by definition excluded women, who are half of the human race; indeed, in the nineteenth century there was an enormous regression in the political and economic power of women in comparison to the *ancien régime*. When you had a society where rulership was based on a family model, you had possibilities for the legitimate participation of at least a small number of women in public life. When the family model was replaced by a contract model – a contract, by definition, among equals – women, being neither autonomous nor considered fully rational, were completely excluded from the political process.

This went on for well over a century in the new representative assemblies that were the principal instrument of governance. So all these radical ideas of freedom enfranchised less than fifty percent of the population, by excluding people of color and women. While a few people like Olympes de Gouges raised the issue of suffrage for women at the time of the Revolution, it was not even considered worthy of discussion. And slavery was indeed abolished in France in 1794, but it was reinstated by Napoleon.

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I want to make one other remark. One of the issues at this conference has been the status of intellectuals, but there has been an unavoidable and inevitable blurring of the difference between intellectuals and writers. Obviously they're not the same; obviously they're not completely different either. It seems to me that one point that has come out of our discussions is that, whatever may be the beleaguered status of intellectuals since they have lost the guaranteed virtue they enjoyed as leading critics of the old regimes, they are not obsolete – though maybe that's one definition of an intellectual: a status, a condition, a kind of consciousness that is always being declared obsolete. And it is intellectuals themselves, with their tendency toward self-deprecation, who lead in making this kind of diagnosis. Today, in Eastern Europe, they have no choice but to continue in their proper role, which is to be in critical opposition. The fact that they will not inherit the leadership of these societies, with their complex burdens of feeling and appalling political and economic deficits, is hardly surprising. It means the role of those who represent values which are neither ethnic nor nationalist is now more essential than ever.

In a sense, the adversaries of intellectuals in these countries are correct. Intellectuals, with their role as critics to fill, cannot be also sponsors or endorsers of tribalist values. There are plenty of people who are going to do that. As it was in the name of universalist values such as truth that the wickedness of the old system was exposed, so it will be as champions of universalist or transnationalist values that intellectuals will continue to play a necessary role. They will also continue to be attacked as "rootless cosmopolitans" – we know what that code-phrase often signifies – though, as I suggested here yesterday, I think that the transnationalist values actually have history on their side.

Adam Michnik: I would like to make a few remarks about what Susan called "the tribal values." The situation in post-Communist Europe is such that its nationalist values have surfaced as an ineradicable element of what Communism left as a legacy to these societies. Today the problem does not consist in the fact that some want to defend those values and others want to reject them. It consists in the political articulation of those needs. The utopia of the ethnically clean state is the clue to understanding the conflict in the Balkans. What was victorious in Serbia or victorious in Croatia was the idea of the ethnically clean state. The Croatian state, for instance, is not just the state of the Croats; it is the state for all Croats where others can be guests.

Susan Sontag: I must reply. When I talk about tribal values I am not disparaging the human need for community. But about your idea of the

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ethnically pure state, I would say something very simple. The idea of the ethnically pure state is a function of economic backwardness. If you have a prosperous country, you cannot be ethnically pure because people from other countries will emigrate there. It is precisely because some countries are still so poor that no one wants to emigrate there; in fact, a large proportion of the population dream of emigrating themselves. That so many of the citizens of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe would leave, if they could, to go to the "West," shows how tragically anachronistic the value of the ethnically pure state is. I remember being asked by an interviewer the first time I came to Budapest, "What is the first thing you notice about the city?" The interviewer expected me to say something about the handsome buildings or the Danube. I answered that I was not accustomed to being in a city where there are only white people.

We can look at what is happening in Japan. Japan is one of the countries with the strongest idea of an ethnically pure state, but it now has a foreign population of immigrant workers – very difficult for the Japanese to accept. If the countries of Eastern Europe do become prosperous, they will not be able to hold on to these old values. These are the values of poverty. The people of Eastern Europe will have to live as the rest of us do, with the fact that all human societies which have reached a decent standard of living will be multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. How we are going to manage this is a tremendous problem in all prosperous countries. In America we have more experience in this because we were a settler country to begin with. But people in all the rich countries are in a state of shock, for they know that even their local communities are no longer likely to be homogeneous. The point is that this, and not the tribal state, is the future.

Vladimir Tismaneanu: These are ailments, I think, of the transition period. Speaking of what Adam suggested and I think I suggested myself, there seems to be a resurgence of ethnocentric movements that can be seen as well in very prosperous countries, where the vote in this direction makes up ten or fifteen percent of the total. I think that it has been one of the myths of sociology that economic prosperity and other developments of modernization in any way suppress a number of nostalgias and mythological needs, such as have been seen even in Western Europe lately – varieties of new or old nationalisms that have been disquieting to many people.

The second element I link to the French intellectuals, such as François Furet, who have helped us greatly to understand the Jacobin dimension in that of course polymorphic revolutionary project. They

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have spoken lately more and more, as has, for example, Alain Besançon about *le besoin d'identité,* the need for identity, and also about *la patrie*, something that was not exactly part of the terminology and rhetoric of the French intelligentsia.

I will, however, try to be a bit more modest and speak about Eastern Europe. First of all, I wonder about the role of certain intellectuals. At least in some countries, intellectuals have been very helpful and productive, although from our perspective, the democratic one, I would say that some of them have been counterproductive,. Intellectuals have been producers not only of symbols and mythologies on behalf of democracy but also against democracy.

The golden generation of the Romanian intelligentsia of the interwar periods, including some of the luminaries that have been written about, such as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, or even Panait Istrati, produced ideas that were about what I would call a mystical revolution. There was a mystical revolution, at least in imagination, and not only in Romania. To quote a point made recently at George Mason University by Daniel Chirot, there has been a great deal of anti-democratic mimeticism in Central and Eastern Europe. Many of the illiberal trends that prospered during the interwar period in the whole region were imported from the West, and adapted from ideas that had tended, after all, to first be dominant in Western Europe. Many Western European intellectuals, with the exception of a few such as Thomas Mann and Herman Hesse, embraced one variety or another of the anti-democratic creed. The prevailing dogma in the intelligentsia then was that democracy was rotten and putrid and that it could not solve any problems. These ideas imbued the anti-parliamentary, anti-bourgeois writings of young Eliade or young Cioran. They read Papini, and Heidegger, and Maurras, and they execrated "philistine" democracy.

Now the message coming from the West is different, because, I think, the intelligentsia in the West has come to a kind of compromise. I hope it will be a long-term compromise, with the values of liberal democracy. So I feel that the source of anti-democratic intellectual thinking that had an enormous impact in Eastern and Central Europe has now vanished and so far has not reappeared.

Susan Sontag: Or they have had their consciousness raised, to use an old phrase, by the experience and the translation of values that we purported to represent here but did not take seriously. It's been a great education for us.

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Question: I think that your observation, Mr. Michnik, that the American Revolution was not based on a utopian vision is a very important one. Nevertheless, the American experience has drawn very heavily from Enlightenment values and in particular on the idea of progress. The idea of progress was very central to the legitimizing myth of the Marxist-Leninist system – corrupt, distorted, no doubt – but the whole idea was progress. Now that we have seen the discrediting of Marxism and Leninism, will the notion of the idea of progress also be discredited? Or will it be available to the new societies that are going to be created in Eastern and Central Europe?

Susan Sontag: Well, if ever there was an illustration of progress, it was the events of 1989. The collapse of this system certainly seemed like progress. I don't think it has taken the discrediting of the Marxist-Leninist system to throw into question the value of progress. The ideology of progress has been under attack for several generations now, linked to the negative consequences of science, and so on. There are very few people who would say they believed in progress *before* the fall of Communism. It is the fall of Communism that has *revived* the notion of progress for many people. What do you think, Adam?

Adam Michnik: I'm a pessimist. I think the idea of progress is ambivalent. I believe in the idea of change and development in the technological sense. But I don't think that, beginning since the time of the Old Testament, people have the capacity to become more perfect in the ethical sense. I think we will have to live with this knowledge, and I think that human values and human freedom will always be in danger. The experience of the twentieth century shows us how shaky the democratic system or order is. I unfortunately disagree with what Susan thinks, that certain problems will end when prosperity comes.

Susan Sontag: I don't think they are going to end.

Adam Michnik: Because prosperity is relative. In France it turns out that the "crisis" is so profound that Le Pen gets twenty percent in the opinion polls. Go and tell the Russians that in France there is crisis!

Question: You have all talked today about the difficulties which East European intellectuals are having in maintaining their positions as social and moral critics, because of the state of the societies, because of their own experiences, and so on. I wonder if you think there is any particular contribution that can be made by those Eastern European intellectuals

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who have lived for a while in the West, in the sense that exiles have a different perspective. Is there any chance of their gaining and being given the status of social and moral critics in Eastern Europe as well?

Vassily Aksyonov: Yes. I believe that Communism was just one phase of many phases of totalitarianism which are still unknown to us, maybe waiting for us around the corner so that when Communism was defeated, there is yet another enemy to face. This is why I believe that it is really ridiculous to talk now about intellectuals being obsolete – right after their historically unique great triumph, in which intellectuals made the greatest contribution to the crush of one of the well-known totalitarian systems in the world. There might have been a chance that they could have become obsolete, if they had indeed woken up one morning and not found any enemy around. And what would the world be without an enemy? So boring!

Thus, history has provided another enemy, many of them, right away. All kinds of populist, nationalist, fascist strains, and even some totalitarian trends really do exist in prosperous countries, free countries in the West. We see a lot of totalitarianism, in the form of really threatening tendencies, in our society in the West. I say "our society" because I have lived in America for many years, and I see a lot of abominable deviations in the culture, of some pressure which the modern press is putting in the minds of the average people. Take for instance the recent developments in the American media: we see that the most thrilling news is coming mostly from the orifices below the belt; the media pumps up local gossip to worldwide proportions. I'm referring, of course, to last season's sex scandals. All this distribution of sperm – what is this country turning into? A nonsensical society. Because of all this, there are a lot of tasks for the intellectuals in any society, including this outwardly prosperous and wide and stable American one, to take on.

Susan Sontag: I want to say, first, I agree with Vassily. But this brings me back to Adam's point. I am not saying that tribalism or national feeling is obsolete. I am not saying that the rich societies are not in crisis. A Le Pen is exactly what you would expect, because the rich societies have to face a completely new situation, which is that they are now multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-racial. Despite the resurgence of xenophobia and other nationalist values, the point is that they will continue to be multi-racial and multi-national societies. This is the form the prosperous nations have inevitably taken; we are living in an era of permanent, unstoppable migration from one country to another. The old notions of borders don't exist. I'm not saying that *because* this is the fact,

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and we must accept it, therefore there is no crisis. No, there will be a resurgence of nationalist values everywhere, not just in the post-Communist societies. Nevertheless, the ideal of the ethnically pure state is ultimately untenable. That's all I'm saying; not that there won't continue to be a violent reaction in all the rich countries as well as in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which are in economic free fall.

Vladimir Tismaneanu: Of course I am simplifying your point, but it seems that the proletarians, the have-nots or those who have less, will remain full of resentment. There will be, of course, resentment at the same time on the part of the elites, but the managerial business elites will have to accept the rules of the game whether they like it or not.

Susan Sontag: Exactly.

Question: The discussion has focused on how to interpret the crisis of the intellectuals' having come, from a position of dominance in the opposition to Communism and in the immediate post-Communist period, to a point where their position is in decline, and how to explain why this decline has occurred. Vladimir Tismaneanu presented the situation as that of universalist, liberal values set against a kind of particularist, tribalist opposition, which already has been somewhat challenged here. But I would like to suggest one other possible explanation for this situation and to hear your reaction to it. That is, I would suggest that many liberal intellectuals are being attacked and criticized and undermined in Eastern Europe not because they are *political* liberals but because they have become *economic* liberals. They have now articulated the position that with liberal individualism, universalism, and Western values comes also a reliance on a free market. They have supported a push towards a radical kind of marketization program – not the only marketization program available in theory – but nevertheless many liberal intellectuals are now saying that there is no other way at the moment. They support the proposals, such as those put forth by Jeffrey Sachs and his plans for Eastern Europe, or those in Russia where proponents say there is no other way to go.

In this way, what happens is that when these reforms become so painful to so many people, they protest against them, and then those liberal intellectuals in the political elite say to their opponents, "Your lack of support is politically dangerous, politically irrational." The opposition in fact is saying, "Wait a minute, we're not intending to undermine liberal political values; it's just that we think in fact the

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program you are proposing itself undermines liberal political values. This radical market program is something that prevents us from being able to really use our democratic rights, our democratic possibilities, in many ways." For us to make this kind of distinction between issues of liberal values and issues that are economic might help us to understand better the crisis facing liberal intellectuals.

Vladimir Tismaneanu: In Eastern Europe, in Western Europe, and in America, the term "liberalism" is, of course, a very ambiguous one. Many people understand many different things when they refer to it now. In one particular publication, I saw that liberal intellectuals were given more or less a moral definition, that they were those who believe in an open society, and defend and try to protect the values of an open society. Here I would turn to one of my favorite recent books, Ralf Dahrendorf's *Reflections on the Revolutions in Europe*. I agree with his definition of liberalism being on one level a contractual dimension of a new society, based on what he calls constitutional politics. We agree that the ultimate value for a society is to agree that individuals should be protected, that minorities should be protected, and that no infringement on human rights should be accepted. Dahrendorf identifies a dichotomy between constitutional values and what he calls normal politics. I would place economic liberalism on the level of normal politics, as opposed to those liberal values that belong at the level of constitutional politics. We see this dichotomy occurring in a number of places, but the situation is most pronounced in Russia. There, those intellectuals associated with the free market and shock-therapy approach to economic reform are perceived by strong groups of the Russian intelligentsia as alien to the Russian soul, as creating problems that will destroy the Russian community, and so on.

I don't think I have an answer. There is still a lot of theoretical confusion in the region and very few serious economic and political programs. In my earlier remarks, I deplored the lack of political parties – there are plenty of formations that call themselves parties, but they are not groups that are shaped around particular interests. This is so partly because the old regime so thoroughly atomized society. The new parties are based more on moral and intellectual affinities; they are barely able to discern and express deep-seated or little-understood social needs and interests. These new societies are in the process of self-discovery.

Another limiting factor is that in Eastern Europe we have a number of parties that have evolved outside of the newly formed parliaments, or before the parliaments came into being. In contrast, in the West, parties

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have built their identity as part of the parliaments; they have become what they are because they have been involved in the parliaments.

To answer your question quite simply, I think that a number of European intellectuals who have spent a lot of time abroad and whose works have been circulating in Eastern Europe are very active at this moment in the region, such as Alex Alexiev, who is an advisor to the Prime Minister of Bulgaria, and Aleksander Smolar in Poland. There are many East European intellectuals who live abroad but who return quite frequently to the region. Among the liberal intellectuals in Eastern Europe, I think that there is great appreciation for the ideas of those intellectuals who have spent time in the West.

Adam Michnik: I agree with Vassily Aksyonov that there is no quiet awaiting us, no order. I don't know if it's a good thing, but we will have to live with it. I'll give only two examples. Serbia: Milosevic for me is an example of a Communist with a xenophobe's face. The president of Georgia is anti-Communism with a Bolshevik face. They both want an ethnically pure state. My quarrel with Susan is not that she does not like an ethnically pure state and I do like it – because I don't like it either. I'm only saying that today we are witnesses of a great wave of these kinds of utopias. When the Iranian revolution exploded and Khomeini came to power, I thought it was total absurdity. Yet it turned out that this was just the first scenario of what could happen in the contemporary world. I promise you that Islamic fundamentalism is not the only fundamentalism that we can witness today.

As far as the role of intellectuals who lived abroad is concerned, they were very, very important in Poland. The principles, the democratic and cultural ideas of the last decades were created by those who emigrated or in the confrontation between the émigres and the people who stayed in the country. As soon as the underground publications appeared, the first authors to be printed were mostly those who lived in emigration, like Czeslaw Milosz, Leszek Kolakowski, and Witold Gombrowicz. I'm against the mystification of the role of an intellectual in the contemporary society. I think we have to accept that we are facing a paradox here. The intellectual, the writer – and here I agree with Susan that the writer and the intellectual are not the same – the more repressed the society is, the more significant the intellectual's and the writer's role becomes. To answer the question, I think in Russia the divisions between the Slavophiles and the Occidentophiles, or in Hungary the quarrel between the urbanists and the ruralists, predates Jeffrey Sachs. All my life it has seemed that someone always has to be found guilty. Once it was Trotsky who was guilty of everything – and now it is Jeffrey Sachs.

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I think we have to deal with the normal debate around the process of modernization. There are always in the countries that are underdeveloped two ways of thinking about modernization. Either we imitate the developed countries, or we look for our own solution. In Poland we had not heard either about Jeffrey Sachs or about the end of Communism, when mud was already being slung at those same intellectuals that are getting it now. But then there is the xenophobic syndrome. When the idea and the fear of Occidental capitalism can organize emotions; when the slogan, "We have to defend Poland; otherwise they will buy it out," is so popular; when meanwhile the real situation is such that we have too little foreign capital and not too much of it; and when I hear that "they" are going to buy out Poland – then I ask who "they" are, because I would be very glad to sell my little bit of Poland! But in fact nobody wants to buy it!

Why is it that intellectuals of a certain kind will always be like a nail in the shoe? Because they are the critical conscience of their societies. And here I would again remind us of the words of Marina Tsvetaeva, that all poets are Jews but that it is better to be a Jew than an anti-Semite.

Question: The idea of an ethnically pure society ruled by the Catholic Church seems to me to be the antithesis of freedom, and I would ask how the intellectual should oppose such states on the basis of human rights, freedom, and morality. I think that may be a tougher role than opposing Communism in general.

Adam Michnik: I hope that such a political program will never come to life in my country, and if it ever does, that by that time we will have acquired some experience in dealing with totalitarian regimes.

Question: Mr. Tismaneanu, your eloquent and lyrical remarks reminded me of my state of mind and that of my generation of Iranian intellectuals, in the wake of the Iranian revolution. Adam Michnik has mentioned one of the points in which these revolutions are similar: it appears that the sentiments of intellectuals in the wake of the revolution are that they feel they have put so much into it – only to see it all wrested away from them by the callow, corrupt, populist elements. My question is, how can we distinguish this state of affairs from the kind of healthy irrelevance intellectuals enjoy in a highly advanced liberal-democratic society, in which they are Adam Michnik's nail in the shoe?

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Vladimir Tismaneanu: I can simply say that the language for my generation, and perhaps for other generations too, was the language of the French Revolution: "Nos idées sont au pouvoir," meaning "Our ideas have come to power." Then we realized that yes, indeed, our ideas have come to power, but not necessarily and not always do our people come to power. So this situation has created a kind of gap between the sentiment of fulfillment, of realization, and the other sentiment which is an uneasiness, malaise, and disenchantment. I think that intellectuals in the East European setting, and I mean Russia as well as Belorussia and Ukraine, its particular context of life and social conditions, fortunately or unfortunately, must still continue to fulfill an apostolic mission. Whether they like it or not, as I said, I think it is going to take some time until the routinization of the intellectual class that has been more or less the case in the West comes about (although in France they still maintain a very special status, even after the fact that one of the great bestsellers in recent years was called *Les Intellocrates*). So I don't think that even in the West intellectuals are so banal, and we have seen from time to time that intellectuals have crucial roles in the West. In the post-Communist world of Eastern Europe, I think it will primarily be the duty of intellectuals to articulate and elaborate the blueprints for change and the evolution of values. However, some of the intellectuals will support initiatives that do not coincide with every single liberal value. There is an illiberal intelligentsia in the region, and especially in Russia, where the situation sometimes makes me tremble. Nevertheless, there are great writers and great intellectuals who are on the other side, so I predict that we will see more and more intellectual debates there.

Susan Sontag: Thank you.

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Central European Writers as a Social Force

Donald Fanger: Our topic today is "Central European Writers as a Social Force." As you know by now, not all of the session or paper titles have gone without revision, and some of them during this panel may need reconstruing. I will invite each of the speakers to do that if such is necessary. Our first speaker is Walter Laqueur, listed in the program as speaking on "The Literature of the Fellow Travelers."

Walter Laqueur: Thank you. Well, to be precise I'll talk about two of the fellow travelers. The motives of those prominent Western fellow travelers visiting Moscow in the 1930s have been a source of fascination and puzzlement for a long time. I want to concentrate here on the trips that two of them took, Romain Rolland in the summer of 1935 and Lion Feuchtwanger in December of 1936. Because of *glasnost* (and the passing of time), one can now write about their motives and impressions with some greater authority than before. There was a fifty-year embargo on Romain Rolland's personal diary, which has become accessible only recently; his Moscow diary was published in three installments in *Voprosy Literaturi* in 1989. As for Feuchtwanger, the daily reports his guide and translator D. Karavkina made to VOKS (and ultimately the NKVD) are now available. [VOKS was the society for cultural ties with foreign countries; the NKVD was the predecessor of the KGB.] The reports on the Feuchtwanger stay were published in *Sovietskie Archivy* in1989. Feuchtwanger's own book *Moscow 1937* was republished in 1990 in the Soviet Union together with Gide's *Return from the USSR*, with a long informative preface by A. Plutnik.

A few words about the *dramatis personae*: Both were major writers; their works seem to have stood the test of time. There is too much gushing, naive idealism in Rolland's *Jean Christophe* for many tastes, and his last novels, *L'âme enchantée*, are now virtually unreadable. But his *Colas Breugnon* is certainly one of the great master works of twentieth-century French literature. Rolland was always more popular in Germany and Russia than in his native country, which may have to do with his unpopular pacifist stance in World War One. The Nobel Prize he received in 1915 was small comfort for the disdain of many of his fellow countrymen and the fact that for years he could not return to France, eventually settling in Villeneuve, on the shore of Lake Geneva. Feuchtwanger was a master in a genre more popular with the reading public

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than with the critics, namely the historical novel. The histories of literature have not had much to say about him, but his best works are still widely read and enjoyed.

Both became aware early of the danger of fascism; Feuchtwanger because he lived in Munich where Hitler first appeared on the political scene. He described the early Nazi movement in a *roman de clèf* called *Erfolg* (the English title, for unknown reasons, was *Power*, rather than *Success*). Rolland had always closely followed events in Italy, and he became an early opponent of Mussolini. Neither Rolland nor Feuchtwanger were ever members of the Communist Party; they were not even social democrats. Though they wrote a great deal about politics, they did so because politics was so heavily in the air; deep down they were unpolitical men. I ought to mention a third, even more famous writer, André Gide, who visited the Soviet Union in between Rolland and Feuchtwanger; his negative impressions, published as *Retour de l'USSR*, became a major scandal. Reread now, it seems rather tame and to have been written in anguish rather than anger, but it deeply offended the Communists. Both Rolland and Feuchtwanger attacked Gide's book in *Pravda*, and it is doubtful whether Feuchtwanger would have been invited had it not been for the feeling that something ought to be done to repair the damage. Feuchtwanger was handed his invitation, which led to a three-hour visit with Stalin, by Mikhail Koltsov, who was, next to Ehrenburg, the most famous journalist of the day. Koltsov was arrested the year after and later executed. Ehrenburg was on the list of the spymasters but for some reason escaped a similar fate.

Rolland's diary, some one hundred-fifty printed pages, covers the period between June 17th and July 23rd of 1935. The mood that year in Moscow was more optimistic than ever before or after. It is true that there had been mass arrests after the Kirov murder, but the mass executions had not yet started. The economic situation had improved and a new constitution, "the freest in the world," had been adopted. There was a feeling of achievement in the air – at least among the people whom Rolland met in Moscow.

He spent much time with Gorky but also talked with Stalin, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Yagoda, head of the secret police. Unlike Feuchtwanger, he was not entirely dependent on a translator; his wife, Masha, was Russian and had family in Moscow. He was a sick man but also a great hypochondriac. Among his most frequent interlocutors were Dr. Levin and Dr. Pletnev, the Kremlin physicians soon to be arrested and executed. Pletnev tried to explain to Rolland that he should not have come in the first place and ought to leave Moscow for a place where

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the air was healthier. The present period in Soviet history, he said, was unhealthy; he himself would have preferred to live forty years later. Rolland either did not understand or pretended not to understand.

Many of the things Rolland disliked in fascist Italy he enjoyed in Moscow – the feeling of purpose, the youthful idealism, the parades, even the cultural conformism. Above all, he was impressed by Stalin, his "absolute simplicity, straightforwardness and truthfulness." Stalin admitted to him that the execution of some hundred people after Kirov's murder had been precipitous and a political mistake but rationalized that it had been necessary as a deterrent. Stalin told him that it was a dirty business and much better not to get involved. But, he continued, once one had decided to liberate the exploited, one did not have the right to opt out. Stalin explained that the Soviet leaders had to take not only world opinion into account but also the domestic situation. Many Russians were very angry that he, Stalin, had spared the lives of people such as Zinoviev and Kamenev. (The interview took place after their first trial.) Did Rolland know that there had been a conspiracy of young women of aristocratic background who aimed to poison the whole Soviet leadership? One young lady librarian had attempted to poison Stalin.

Rolland asked about the introduction of capital punishment for minors from the age of twelve. Stalin answered that such a measure could not be understood by the West. He muttered something about yet another conspiracy and concluded that Rolland should rest assured that death sentences would be passed only in very rare cases. Rolland wrote in his diary: "When I heard about these horrible crimes committed by women and children, I understood that we in the West tend to forget these realities. The Bolsheviks still have to fight for a long time against the cruel, barbaric old Russia."

For every negative feature, Rolland found an excuse or at least some mitigating circumstances. And yet, one has a sense of underlying uneasiness, a lack of enthusiasm. Rolland disliked some of the movies he watched; he disliked the Moscow weather; and he regretted that Esperanto had been banned in the Soviet Union. He fought hard for the release of Victor Serge – a French-Russian oppositionist who had been in a Soviet prison for years. He explained to Stalin and Yagoda that he had no sympathies for Serge's views, but that they should realize Serge's continued detention was grist for the anti-Soviet mills in the West. Serge was released the following year, no doubt due to Rolland's intervention. Rereading his diary after his return from Moscow, Rolland concluded that he had been perhaps too critical and written with too much haste. In retrospect, the negative aspects of the Soviet regime were outweighed

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by the positive features: "I have no shadow of a doubt that the best hopes of the world rest on the assumption of a Soviet victory."

However, Rolland apparently did have some dire forebodings. He would not have dreamed of uttering these doubts in public, but he did write to Stalin in 1937 asking for clemency for Bukharin, whom he had met in Moscow two years earlier. About the mass terror, he wrote at the end of 1937 in his diary: "I defend not Stalin but the Soviet Union, I stand for freedom, for people who are masters of their own destiny. Idolatry be it of Stalin, Hitler or Mussolini is a most damaging thing."

It is more difficult to find mitigating circumstances for Feuchtwanger's book – except one perhaps; the subtitle was "a report for my friends." This was a propagandistic work which the Soviet authorities produced in record time. The manuscript was translated within a few days, typeset in twenty-four hours, and printed within two to three weeks in Moscow, Amsterdam, and New York. Two hundred thousand copies in Russian were produced, but *habent sua fat libelli*, soon after withdrawn. It was never reprinted and was excluded from the Russian edition of Feuchtwanger's collected works. It was thought that Feuchtwanger's approach would be very effective for Western consumption, yet for the Soviet public he was too objective, even critical. After attending the Radek-Pyatakov trial, for instance, he wrote that for people in the West the basic motives of the accused and their behavior in court could not be wholly comprehensible. He also wrote that the deification of Stalin could not be comprehended as long as one looked at the Soviet Union through Western eyes.

His Soviet hosts were in a great hurry to get some statement out of him even before his book was to appear, and thus he was invited to write an article for *Pravda*. It appeared on December 30th, 1936, and was titled, "An Aesthete in the Soviet Union." In it, he dealt with André Gide's allegations that there was a cult of the individual in the Soviet Union. It is true, Feuchtwanger wrote, that Stalin was honored in the Soviet Union in a way not customary by Western standards. But if one looked at the phenomenon closely, one would find this had nothing really to do with Stalin as a person, rather with Stalin as the embodiment of socialism. It was not an artificial cult; it had developed as the result of real socialist achievements. People were grateful to Stalin for their having bread and butter, education, law and order, and for creating a strong army. When the people said "Stalin," it meant prosperity and enlightenment.

Was Feuchtwanger aware of the real situation in the Soviet Union? Up to a point, yes, although sometimes for the wrong reasons. He constantly complained about the lack of material comforts there; the light in

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his hotel room was insufficient, the furniture ugly, the service inefficient and unhelpful. He even suggested that Gide, a sensitive man and an artist, had been similarly irritated and offended by the Russians. In brief, much of the time there Feuchtwanger was in a foul mood, though somewhat appeased by the enthusiastic ovations he received in the theater and by his interview with Stalin. However, he continued to complain: he did not get his mail on time; the editor of *Pravda*, Mekhlis (a particularly unsavory character) had asked him to make some changes in his article about the Stalin cult.

Feuchtwanger's Soviet companion complained that despite all the precautionary measures and controls that had been made, Feuchtwanger was seeing all kinds of doubtful characters. Thus, Piscator's wife had told him about the housing situation in Moscow; last summer she had spent several weeks in the street because she had no shelter. He wanted to know whether it was true that Pasternak was in disfavor and no longer printed. Why, he asked, did the Russian leaders publish only the nineteenth-century classics,and why were they afraid of modern writers? He had long conversations with Soviet officials about democracy and freedom of speech, but he told his companion that they had not persuaded him. Yet unlike Gide, he was not an aesthete, so he went on to defend Stalin's policy and, above all, the trials.

Gide was politically more naive than Feuchtwanger. He had taken the news about the new democratic constitution seriously, and he was bitterly disappointed when he realized that, far from becoming more democratic, the Soviet regime was turning more and more tyrannical. Feuchtwanger was not disillusioned, since he had no illusions in the first place. A Russian commentator, Plutnik, writing in 1990 exaggerates when he observes that "Feuchtwanger was not deceived. He saw everything and understood everything." He saw very little in his three weeks in Moscow, and he did not, of course, understand everything. Above all, the behavior of the defendants in the trial he attended and the accusations against them remained a riddle to him. It is doubtful whether he was convinced by his own explanations. Why did the accused not defend themselves? He reported what the Soviet people were saying, but this was not quite persuasive. Perhaps he had missed something in translation? He concluded that probably a major Russian writer was needed to explain this psychological mystery. But there was no such writer. After his departure, Feuchtwanger ceased to be interested in Moscow, Stalin, and the trials. He remained a fellow traveler and signed various appeals in defense of the Soviet Union. He did not write the series of profiles he had promised his hosts about the outstanding leaders he had met such as Molotov, Voroshilov, and so on. Instead, he went back to his historical

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novels about Goya, the American Revolution, and the last part of the Josephus trilogy.

In recent years, the Feuchtwanger affair and the writings of other Westerners who have whitewashed Stalin and the trials have provided ammunition for a number of Russian writers on the extreme right of the ideological spectrum. Their argument runs, in brief, as follows: The Russian people cannot be made responsible in any way for the "cult of the individual." Stalinism was a world-wide phenomenon "from Madrid to Shanghai." If such humanists and astute observers of human behavior like Barbusse, Rolland, and Feuchtwanger, who were under no compulsion and pressure, totally misjudged the real state of affairs, why blame the poor Russians who were living in a totalitarian dictatorship?

The real explanation, as I see it, is simpler. Rolland, Feuchtwanger, and the others were indeed students of human behavior, but their experience was limited in the main to France and Germany. I don't think they ever understood England and America – let alone the Soviet Union. Their political interest was not very deep, although they did sense that Europe was on the eve of a war. This theme occurs repeatedly both in Rolland's *Diary* and in Feuchtwanger's *Moscow 1937*. Having to choose between Hitler and Stalin, they opted for the latter. Seen in this light, any criticism of Stalin and the Soviet Union was tantamount to weakening the anti-Fascist alliance. Feuchtwanger feared that the West was no longer capable of resisting Hitler. At the end of his book, he wrote that Western civilization was in decline, that it could no longer take decisive action and was cowardly and hypocritical. The very air in the West was poisoned; in Russia it was fresh. So he concluded this "report for his friends" with three cheers for the Soviet Union, despite all the problems as yet unresolved there. Stalin and his people were the only hope for stemming the tide of Nazi barbarism. The argument is a little shaky. The decapitation of the Red Army was certainly not the best way to prepare the Soviet Union for war, and in any case Stalin did not believe that a military conflict with Nazi Germany was near. The real enemy was the West.

It is not my assignment here to examine the validity of the arguments of our two fellow travelers. All that matters in this context is that they genuinely believed that the West was finished and that the Soviet Union was the only bulwark against a Nazi victory. As for the rest, Romain Rolland died in 1944 at Lake Geneva; Feuchtwanger moved to Pacific Palisades, California, despite the fact that he had so much liked the Moscow air. He never went back to the Soviet Union, but he never recanted either. In a sampler of his work that Feuchtwanger published in

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Germany in the 1950s, excerpts from the "report to my friends" were included. He died in 1958.

Donald Fanger: Thank you. Our second speaker is Victor Erlich, whose topic is "The Dilemma of One Polish Writer."

Victor Erlich: The focus for my brief note is provided by a work born of a dialogue between an ailing Polish poet, Alexander Wat, and Czeslaw Milosz that took place at Berkeley in 1965. This memorable exchange dominated by Wat's voice eventually gave rise to a two-volume book in Polish, *Moj wiek*, and somewhat later to an English version brilliantly abridged by Richard Lourie and Czeslaw Milosz – *My Century*.

That Alexander Wat's *My Century* is one of the major human documents of our time and the most significant Polish work of nonfiction for many a year, has by now been widely recognized. It is equally apparent that Wat's staggered and staggering testimony, so skillfully elicited by Czeslaw Milosz, owes much of its resonance to the speaker's passionate engagement with one of our century's salient issues – the nature of Communism, the sources and consequences of its appeal. Yet if *My Century* is much more than another addition to the vast body of literature of disenchantment with Communism, more than another instance of the "God that failed" syndrome, this fact is due in no small measure to the distinctive vantage point and, no less importantly, the intellectual caliber of this memoir.

It would be an understatement to say that throughout his reminiscences Wat is preoccupied with his central theme. He is demonstrably and avowedly obsessed with it in an uncannily personal, indeed morbid sort of way, to the extent of positing some "demonic" connection between his bout with Communism and his debilitating illness. (Early in his narrative, he speaks of Communism as "illness-producing" and describes his dialogue with Milosz as an "exorcism".) Now, as we have seen time and again, a fixation on one's erstwhile political sins can easily turn into an impoverishing, vindictive, or self-punitive single-mindedness. Yet when an obsession with a major issue is lodged in a first-rate intelligence and a fine literary sensibility, it is apt to become a source of public illumination as well as of private anguish. Moreover, as the most gifted member of the embattled band of the Polish Futurists, indeed the only one among them to develop eventually into an original and serious poet, and an editor of a short-lived pro-Communist literary journal, *Miesiecznik literacki* (*Literary Monthly*) from 1929 to 1932, Wat was in a nearly unique position to offer telling commentary on the problem of the relationship between the literary avant-garde and the political left.

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It is the vagaries of this precarious alliance as they are reflected in the prewar section of Wat's memoirs that shall provide the focus for my brief and sketchy remarks. I may as well admit to a strong personal interest in Wat's vivid reconstruction of the Warsaw literary and social scene between the two wars. As one who came of age in Warsaw of the 1930s and who grew up in the milieu of the Jewish socialist intelligentsia, I experienced many a shock of recognition as I read *My Century*. There were also, parenthetically, some shocks of nonrecognition, some less than heartwarming surprises. It seems that as a budding activist I had vastly underestimated the extent of the Communist infiltration into the ranks of the left wing of the Polish socialist movement. Yet my main justification for choosing to share with you some of the highlights of the Warsaw phase of Wat's odyssey lies in the larger relevance of his retrospective diagnoses, in the aptness of his hard-earned generalizations.

Early in the story, Wat makes it clear that the attempt to blend aesthetic and political radicalism was essentially a one-way street. He speaks shrewdly of the Mayakovsky syndrome – and Mayakovsky's was a name to conjure in the circles of the Polish avant-garde! – the tragically false equation of what was inaccurately called a "revolution in art" with the social revolution: "Since this is revolution, it must be the same thing. And here an interesting thing happened. It is we, the so-called intellectuals, who felt an abiding need for monotheism, for being left-wing across the board." "Real Communists," continued Wat, "did not have this need. Though their doctrine is absolutely monolithic, in practice they would differentiate. Lenin . . . could not stand Mayakovsky's verse; he liked Gorky's prose. Stalin called Mayakovsky the greatest poet of the Soviet era for political reasons, but, as is well known, he detested his verse and his experimentation."

Wat reminds us that enthusiasm for the October Revolution on the part of the innovative Warsaw literati was in no way diminished by their increasing awareness of the human cost of the Bolshevik enterprise. Wat and his *confreres* read avidly Aleksandr Blok, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and early Soviet prose, including Boris Pilnyak and the candidly disheveled pageant of the Civil War savagery, *Russia Washed by Blood* by Artyom Vesely. Yet not unlike most of their Russian counterparts, even if they saw the horrors of the Revolution, they accepted them as necessary, as a purifying sacrifice. "The more blood, the stronger the proof that the cause is holy."

The Polish avant-garde intellectual's susceptibility to the mythology and the rhetoric of the Russian Revolution was further enhanced by his apocalyptic or, if you will, Spenglerian view of his own culture. The urge toward a total renewal, a clean break with the past, was fueled by

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the sense that, as Wat puts it, "what had just occurred was a total earthquake," a frame of mind that found its extreme expression in Dadaism. Now if I may digress for a moment, where the Dadaism *avant la lettre* of the Russian Futurist movement, most notably of its "trans-sense" variety, was a matter of dislocation of language, the Polish Futurists shared with their Dadaist contemporaries the postwar trauma of "nihilism," of a total collapse of faith in the viability of the Western civilization. A nihilism, argues Wat, which made one singularly vulnerable to the temptation of the Communists' "new faith." Wat's own evolution tells a significant story. Actually, in contradistinction to some of his fellow Futurists, he was rather slow in embracing the cause of Soviet Communism. As Milosz reminds us, as late as 1926 he published an ironic, paradox-ridden and brilliantly negativistic collection of stories entitled *Lucifer Unemployed*, which subverted all pieties. In fact, when this book was republished in 1959, as astute an essayist as Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski was moved to wonder whether it was written after Wat's break with Communism. In answering Milosz's query as to how he happened to espouse Communism in the wake of producing so irreverent and playful a work, Wat said simply; "I got stupid," and added in a somewhat more substantive vein, "I could not stand my nihilism, if you will, atheism." Calling everything into question became an intolerable burden. At this point Milosz is appropriately reminded of Bertolt Brecht. *Mutatis mutandis*, that is, making due allowance for a significant difference in literary stature, one could cite also the case of Ilya Ehrenburg. In his memoirs, *People, Years, Life*, which, admittedly, is only partly reliable, he offers a similar clue to this metamorphosis from a freewheeling muckraker to a skillful Soviet propagandist: "I could not live by negation alone, I was chilled by [presumably his own] satirical smirks."

Wat is no less revealing about the consequences of the Communist engagement for a creative individual than he is in discussing the roads leading to it. Though he never joined the Party, he was for a number of years an active and influential "fellow traveler," a prolific and articulate Marxist critic and political essayist. As editor of the leftist *Literary Monthly*, he tried hard to follow the shifting Party line. Interestingly enough, during this period he proved incapable of producing, or to be exact, of publishing, any verse of fiction. Apparently, his was too fine and original a literary sensibility to yield to the crippling demands of proletarian realism. Thus, as a creative writer he was effectively paralyzed by the irreconcilable conflict between his Marxist-Leninist politics and his essentially modernist aesthetics:

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> I kept writing, but I didn't want to publish, since my so-called poetics was anti-Marxist, prone to irrationalism. . . . I tried to adapt my fiction to political views, but the results were terrible. . . . I didn't want to publish this stuff. And what I thought good I could not publish either, for my Communist conscience would not allow it. So I shut up. . . . I wrote then a great deal, but I would destroy everything, for whatever I wrote was either bad or non-Marxist.

Throughout the 1930s, the lot of the Polish Communist or Communist-sympathizer was, to put it mildly, not a happy one. Not only was he or she apt to suffer harassment at the hands of an increasingly repressive regime (*The Literary Monthly* was banned by the authorities in 1931, and Wat spent a couple of months in Warsaw jails). Moreover, and more importantly, his or her faith in the Soviet Union was severely taxed by Stalin's policies – the forced collectivization and the dread purges – which entailed a near annihilation of the Polish Communist elite. For a while Wat managed to look away, to live, in his own words, with his eyes half-shut. Yet toward the end of the grim decade, his mounting doubts, his revulsion from the Great Terror, could no longer be assuaged.

This was not necessarily the case with his fully committed friends. "In 1937," he recalls, "when I would say to some prominent Communists, 'Is not [the evil of all] this apparent to you by now?' they would answer: . . . 'Yes, we know, but we cannot simply leave – this is our entire youth.' " "Communism," continues Wat, "has shown how immensely difficult it is to walk out on one's youth if it has been a kind of peak experience. All these old Communists who came to Communism by different paths reached it by the road of idealism and selflessness."

It is clear that the vehemence of Wat's ultimate recoil from Communism had not made him vindictive toward his former traveling companions, had not prevented him from respecting, indeed admiring, the original motives of those seduced by the mirage. A salient example of such fair-mindedness is Wat's entirely persuasive portrait of one of Wat's chief associates on the editorial board of *The Literary Monthly*, the Communist stalwart Jan Hempel. Their coexistence was not always harmonious. As the liaison with the Party, Hempel, was a guardian of political orthodoxy, forever on the lookout for anything that smacked of a "deviation," most notably of Trotskyism. A relentless simplifier, he would clash repeatedly with Wat and a doctrinaire but highly intelligent Marxist critic, Andrzej Stawar. Yet, he emerges in Wat's narrative as an uncommonly appealing human being – a man of total integrity, purity and personal kindness. These admirable qualities, combined with an al-

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most pathological fear of the mortal sin of heresy, suggest to Wat a striking observation: "We see here a duality of remarkable courage, heroism and nonconformism with terrible fear and extreme conformism." Courage and heroism, that is, in facing the powers that be, the outside world, the class enemy, and total submissiveness to, and craven fear of, one's own authorities, the Party.

This sketch of a Communist true believer points across the expanse of many pages, of a full decade and a thousand miles, toward what is, without any doubt, the most dramatic moment of Part Two of *My Century*, indeed of all of Wat's testimony – a conversation in the Saratov prison hospital with the dying old Bolshevik Nakhamkes Steklov. One of the most eminent victims of the Great Terror, Steklov was spared an execution and allowed to die a slow death in Stalin's prisons. The chance encounter between the Polish poet, stranded in Stalin's gulag and the terminally sick relic of the old Bolshevik elite, in a prison van headed for the hospital, produces instant rapport. Wat is stuck by Steklov's innate distinction, the aristocratic fineness of his gaunt, ravaged face, the elegance of his diction, his familiarity with the Polish intellectual tradition, and, above all, by the intensity of his passion. (It seems that it was Steklov's burning hatred of Stalin that kept him alive through all his ordeals). At some point in the wide-ranging exchange a vexing question predictably surfaces: "Why did the heroes of the Revolution confess? . . . How come they stooped so low? . . . Were they afraid of torture?" Wat recalls Steklov answering him:

> "Torture? Who needed it? All, all of us," – I remember almost every word of this, for even though I was feverish I felt a cold shudder because of the way he said it, "had our arms up to our elbows in shit and blood . . . Every one of us, the arrested heroes of the Revolution, had on our conscience so many degradations and villainies, and that almost from the beginning, that we really did not care. To confess or not to confess, this was not important. A man who knew that his entire life was full of degradation . . . felt a revulsion from his own past. This revulsion . . . explains the confessions."

It seems to me that in order to fully appreciate the import of Steklov's *cri de coeur*, one ought to supplement it by Wat's insight into Jan Hempel's "duality." "Revulsion from one's past," a sense of guilt and unworthiness induced by contemplating one's past misdeeds, would not have prevented the old Bolsheviks, I believe, from standing up to the Fascist inquisition. (Witness the courage shown by the international

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Communist Dmitrov at the Nazi trial). It was in facing their *own* apparatus of repression and deceit that the architects of the October Revolution found themselves caught in a web of complicity and subservience. The monstrous frame-up in which they were arraigned was but a gruesome sequel to, and a grotesque extension of, the falsehoods they had perpetrated, the frame-ups they had helped engineer in the service of the Party which now, in turning on its own, wanted their blood.

To probe the similarities and the differences between Steklov's "explanation" and Arthur Koestler's well-known hypothesis would take me too far afield. Let me return to Wat's text. Shortly after his "confession," Steklov, clearly at the end of his tether, is removed from the room which he has shared with Wat. As he is being taken away, he manages to cry out: "When you return to Poland, tell them how old Steklov was dying!"

As it happened, it took Wat a number of years to fulfill this request. Yet the old revolutionary could not have found a more responsive listener or a better chronicler than the ex-radical Polish intellectual, already in the throes of an anguished quest for the essence of *le mal du siécle* – of his, and our, century's fatal affliction.

Donald Fanger: Thank you, Victor. Our next speaker is Michael Heim. His topic is "Central European Writing in America."

Michael Heim: Until recently the Central European confronted by even the best-meaning Americans had to put up with the almost mythical "Yugoslovakia/Czechoslavia syndrome," according to which the string of nation-states stretching between the once and now current Germany and Russia represented a barely distinguishable gray mass. It is true that the real parameters of the situation there were occasionally clarified by current events: during an invasion or civil war the American public, bombarded by the media, would sort things out for a while, but a year or two later the confusion would return. Interestingly enough, the Central European media are now reporting an analogous phenomenon. A recent article in the Hungarian press begins by decrying the American innocent who gushes about his two-day stay "in your beautiful capital Bucharest," but goes on to ask how many Hungarians know that the capital of California is neither Los Angeles nor even San Francisco. Given that the population of Hungary is roughly half that of California, the author of the article concludes, isn't the Hungarian who blanks at the mention of Sacramento as provincial as the American who confuses Bucharest with Budapest?

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Provinciality is the key concept here. Central Europe is keenly aware of its marginality, of living on the periphery. Of course, we Americans are even more on the periphery, though for most of this century we haven't felt it and for its second, post-war half, at least, we have even managed to convince Europe that we are not. Now that Europe is making a comeback, we are on the point of being shunted back into marginality, but more about that later.

For now, let us go back to the beginning of the century and place our relations with Central Europe in the framework of recent history. To a great extent World War One made us an integral part of Europe for the first time since our Revolution, and we made the most of the situation at Versailles, when Wilson played a major role in carving the Habsburg Empire into a number of successor states. We did not, however, follow through. We made no protest twenty years later, in 1938, when Sir Neville Chamberlain, fully aware of Hitler's intent to invade Czechoslovakia, referred in a radio broadcast to the British Empire to "a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing." (Another Englishman had betrayed an infinitely more benign ignorance of or indifference to the area three centuries earlier when he set scenes of his play *The Winter's Tale* on "the seacoast of Bohemia.")

If Munich and 1938 led inexorably to the outbreak of the war, Yalta and 1945 brought on its long, cold aftermath. Here is how George Kennan described the situation at the time in a letter to Charles Bohlen, Roosevelt's right-hand man at Yalta: "I recognize that Russia's war effort has been masterful and effective and must, to a certain extent, find its reward at the expense of other peoples in Eastern and Central Europe." Kennan's plan, eventually adopted, was to contain Stalin by partitioning Europe, to "divide Europe frankly into spheres of influence, keep ourselves out of the Russian sphere and keep the Russians out of ours." In other words, as he puts it even more bluntly elsewhere in the letter, "the United States should write off Eastern and Southeastern Europe."

Hence the Cold War (before the hot one was over); hence the Iron Curtain ("From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic," said Churchill in the speech – to a small Missouri college – that gave a name to the concept, "an iron curtain has descended across the Continent"); hence the Soviet bloc. The idea of the Soviet bloc banished whatever might have remained of the idea of Central Europe. Admittedly, when an uprising or a springtime or a paroxysm of martial legality occurred, we took separate notice of the country in question, especially if an invasion followed and flooded our country with freedom-fighter émigres. But we saw them less as fleeing their country than their bloc, a bloc as uniform and gray as the blocks of flats lining their cities' streets.

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If we showed any interest in their culture during the fifties and sixties, it was in their cinema (perhaps because of the heavy dose of Central European sensibility in our own film industry dating from the thirties and forties, when Hollywood was all but colonized by Central European directors, cameramen, and composers). Literature, with few exceptions, lagged behind, and the small number of works that were in fact translated and published here virtually disappeared. American intellectuals did not acquire a more nuanced view of Central Europe until the late seventies and early eighties. I would suggest several reasons for the change.

American society was experiencing a new wave of immigration at the time, and the increasing cultural diversity and new emphasis on multiculturalism helped to raise consciousness here, but a major initiative came not so much from within America or even from Central Europe itself as from France. The *sciences humaines*, French criticism, and French intellectual life in general enjoyed great prestige among American intellectuals during the late seventies, the period during which structuralism started shading into post-structuralism, but also during which the most popular author among intellectuals was none other than the most Central European of Central Europeans, Milan Kundera. Kundera's novel *The Joke*, which came out in Czech in 1967, first appeared in French shortly after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, with an introduction by Louis Aragon calling it "one of the greatest novels of the century." But Kundera's popularity did not begin to burgeon until after he settled in France in 1975. The French welcomed him as they rarely welcome a foreigner. He was a fine novelist (at a time when the French novel was not at its apogee); he was a connoisseur of French culture (which he had taught at the famous Prague Film School); and he came to the French at a time when a new rash of book-length confessions about "why I remained a Communist for so long" (the first since 1956, when Krushchev's anti-Stalin speech at the Twentieth Party Congress and the Hungarian Uprising occasioned a round of defections among the intellectuals) appeared. Kundera's stories and novels had been duly translated into English, but not until they became bestsellers in France did they begin to reach a broader audience here. In fact, with Kundera's ascendancy, a minor boom in Central European literature took hold here.

Like France, Latin America played an indirect role in the boom. The unprecedented success of the Latin American novel, such as the works of Borges, Garcia Márquez, and Fuentes, in North America during the sixties and seventies helped to attune readers here to novels in translation. Moreover, Latin American authors and their Central European counterparts exhibit certain common traits. Latin America shares Central Eu-

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rope's geographical and historical marginality and – *pace* Jeane Kirkpatrick, who popularized the distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes – a recent history of dictatorship and the terror that goes with it. The regions also share a strong Catholic tradition; they thus have a close connection to the Baroque, which makes itself felt not only in the architecture of their capitals but also in the primacy of the illusion/reality dichotomy in literature. Surely, it is not by chance that both Kundera and Vaclav Havel, who represent opposite ideological positions, refer repeatedly to Don Quixote. Kundera opens his study, *The Art of the Novel*, with a chapter on "The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes," and Havel, in a highly different vein and context, in his essay "An Anatomy of Reticence," likens the dissident to the Don, demanding "freedom and rights all alone, with nothing but a pen in his hand, face to face with the gargantuan might of the state."

Central European writers also enjoyed the support of the Nobel Prize for Literature, which was awarded to a trio of fine Central European choices – Czeslaw Milosz, Elias Canetti, and Jaroslav Seifert – during the early eighties. Since then Milosz has been particularly active in writing and lecturing about the cultural cohesion of the area.

Let us return to Kundera, whose name is still most closely associated with the boom. Although he rightfully balks at being considered a "political novelist," Kundera defined Central Europe for the West as much in his essays and interviews as in his fiction. Most deliberations on the Central European issue go back to his essay, "The Central European Tragedy," originally published in *Le Débat* and reprinted here, in April 1984, in *The New York Review of Books*. In fact, he had made the main points several years earlier in an interview with Philip Roth appended to the paperback edition of his novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: "As a concept of cultural history, Eastern Europe is Russia, with its quite specific history anchored in the Byzantine world. Bohemia, Poland, Hungary, just like Austria, have never been part of Eastern Europe. From the very beginning they have taken part in the great advance of Western civilization, with its Gothic, its Renaissance, its Reformation – a movement which has its cradle precisely in this region. It was here, in Central Europe, that modern culture found its greatest impulses: psychoanalysis, structuralism, dodecaphony, Bartok's music, Kafka's and Musil's new aesthetics of the novel."

The results of the discovery of Central Europe on the part of the American intellectual public are truly impressive. What I will call for want of a better name the intellectual media – *Partisan Review* of course, *The New York Review*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The New Republic*, *The*

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New York Times Book Review and its analogues at *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*, and many others – have contributed greatly with articles and reviews, with translations of essays and speeches. Other smaller-circulation, more specialized periodicals have also been attentive to the area: *Formations*, edited by Jonathan Brent, a quarterly devoted to contemporary world art and literature, and *East European Politics and Societies*, edited by Ivo Banac, a quarterly with a broad social-science perspective. The periodical most clearly concentrating on Central Europe as a cultural entity, however, is *Cross Currents*, which was founded in 1982 by Ladislav Matejka as (according to its subtitle) "A Yearbook of Central European Culture." A miscellany of primary and secondary sources, it not only provides a basic education in Central Europe but virtually defines the field.

Various public and private organizations have also played their part. The East European Studies Program of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, as part of the Smithsonian Institution, sponsors scholars from the area for extended stays, who have thereby helped to raise our consciousness and the consciousness of their own countries when they return. The Wilson Center's *Wilson Quarterly* has also featured Central Europe prominently in recent years. A particularly spectacular contribution to the field has come from the New York-based Soros Foundation, which began by bringing over individual scholars from Hungary, the native country of its founder George Soros, and has expanded throughout East-Central Europe with a large number of educational and cultural projects. Most ambitious is the Central European University, a post-graduate, degree-granting institution based primarily in Prague but with an active branch in Budapest, that focuses on area studies of the region, primarily in social science but with a humanities component as well.

American universities have responded to the new interest in Central Europe in various ways. Departments of sociology, anthropology, and economics, traditionally less than friendly to the area because it is so labor-intensive (its many "small" languages and cultures need to be studied separately) and because in Cold War conditions the countries involved tended to hinder fieldwork and fudge statistics, have started opening up to it. The Joint Committee on Eastern Europe under the aegis of the American Council of Learned Societies has for several years now carried on a competition to initiate tenure-track teaching positions for experts in the area by providing five years of funding, after which the university takes over. In the last few years a number of universities have instituted courses in Central European literature, incorporating pertinent Austrian,

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Croatian, Czech, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Romanian, and Serbian works. University presses have not only responded but have also been actively soliciting scholarship in the area, and Northwestern University Press, under the leadership of Jonathan Brent, has reprinted many Central European literary classics in translation. Lastly, commercial publishers have – until recently at least – done their share admirably. Special recognition must go to Penguin and Philip Roth for their series, Writers from Other Europe, which did a great deal to make a wide range of Central European literature available in paperback.

Lately, however, there are signs of trouble. Is the literary boom of the eighties going to end with the end of the economic boom of the eighties? I would hate to think that the commitment to making some of the finest contemporary writers and thinkers available to the English-speaking public resulted primarily from the financial cushion that gave publishers the leeway to take a risk. I would hate to think that as Central Europe loses its enemy status with the end of the Cold War, as it sinks into the economic limbo of a struggling, semifree market society, it will lose its allure for the West. I would like to think that the American intellectual public has grown more sophisticated in the past ten years, has grown to need the stimulation these writers have provided.

The new situation I sense may to some extent be a factor of a new attitude on the part of Central European intellectuals. The concept of Central Europe was attractive as long it provided an antidote to Eastern Europe. In fact, I first heard intellectuals there talk in terms of Central Europe (or "Danubian Federation") during 1968 in Prague. I then heard it transferred to the street when, just after the Soviet invasion, I was standing in line for bread and listened to a woman old enough to have remembered the Dual Monarchy complain that good old Franz Josef would never have allowed the Russians in. What she failed to remember was that Franz Josef *invited* the Russians in to put down the Hungarians in 1849. In any case, the enthusiasm among Central European intellectuals for the concept of Central Europe has dwindled considerably since 1989. The enthusiasm is now for a Europe without epithets, Europe *tout court*.

Integration into the European Community certainly makes sense economically. But Central Europe enjoys a cultural specificity that has nothing to do with backwardness. One has only to remember the names adduced by Kundera. I recall the late and much lamented, irreplaceable and quintessentially Central European writer Danilo Kis, who at a conference analogous to this one several years ago defined Central Europe – only half facetiously – as that part of the world where you can spend all day in a coffeehouse with one cup of coffee and any number of newspa-

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pers hanging from a rack on wooden poles. There is, of course, much more to it than that. But if I had to pinpoint what it has offered to us as readers and writers, I would say that it is not so much a new world in the sense of being a geographical or socio-political region as in the sense of having a commitment to taking ideas seriously, to the introduction – unobtrusive at its best – of philosophical inquiry into literature, to coaxing literature to grapple with the abstract. On another level it has taught us that literature and the arts in general can be taken seriously by a society, that they do count, that they are not mere icing, froth, entertainment; it has done so partly by showing us that artists can suffer not only in garrets but also in labor camps. And lastly, it has given us an incentive to move outside the self, to the body politic as well as the body as such. This may make it seem dry, but anyone who has read this literature knows it is anything but that.

Hemingway once said that in wartime a writer has no need to worry about subject matter; the same could be said of the writer in a totalitarian regime. Central European writers now agonize over whether they have lost their *raison d'etre* by losing the need to oppose their regimes. When writers serve as their country's parliament, what is left when that country *establishes* a parliament, a real one? By now what has been clear in these United States for two centuries should be clear in Central Europe: having parliament does not necessarily mean having a conscience. There is still plenty of work for the writer to do.

Last November, George Konrad, in his capacity as President of International PEN, the writers' organization, gave a talk entitled "The World of Literature and the World," in which he expressed this point in a typically Central European aphoristic manner. "What is left," he asked, "when there is no more devil?" My answer would be that the devil is still there. In fact, the situation is all the more insidious, the devil more difficult to spot. As I see it, therefore, Central European writers haven't had the rug pulled out from under them, and I am confident they will continue to have a great deal to say to their people and to us.

Donald Fanger: Thank you.

"Russian Writing in America": the several senses of my elastic title could produce a curious and useful book. One chapter might deal with Russian writing produced in America, from Gorky's *Mother*, written in the Adirondacks, through the work of such transplanted poets as Nikolai Morshen and Ivan Elagin, to that of the most recent wave of arrivals, beginning in the 1970s – Brodsky, Solzhenitsyn, Dovlatov, Aksyonov, Sokolov, Limonov. Another might deal with the invaluable service rendered in America to Russian letters by publishing enterprises like Carl and

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Ellendea Proffer's Ardis, Chalidze Publications, Inter-Language Literary Associates, and the Chekhov Publishing House; by such independent periodicals as the *Novyi Zhurnal*; and by the premier editions of poets – Gumilev, Akhmatova, Mandelstam, Pasternak – produced here. A historical chapter would consider Russian writing as mediated for Americans by translators, publishers, reviewers, and, beginning some fifteen years after the end of the Second World War, by several generations of American scholars whose engagement with the Russian language and culture went beyond the occasional. There might, if someone could devise a way to avoid distressing generalities, be a consideration of the impact of Russian writing on American writers, and there would surely be a tracing of the reception of Russian writing by the American reading public, an analytic charting of the place it has occupied in the American literary consciousness.

In the absence of such a book, I want to use the title I was assigned to cover a few remarks on the ultimately unknowable situation of literature in Russia today – unknowable because what Russian scholars like to call "the literary process" is clearly carving out new channels, not all of them yet mappable. In the interests of concreteness and economy, much of what follows is in the form of quotation, much of it taken from the Russian press; the American angle comes chiefly from the fact that an American is doing the quoting. But, as Bakhtin has insisted (and Stavrogin before him), the same words take on different meanings depending on who utters them and in what situation.

I group my remarks under three headings. The first two sections ("The Singularity of Russian Literature" and "The Double Standard") set up a context for the last ("Toward Normalization") which sketches the current state of affairs.

The Singularity of Russian Literature: By the middle of the nineteenth century the complaints of earlier decades that Russia had no literature commensurate with that of contemporary England, France, and Germany had ceased; what came to be called the Golden Age of Russian literature was already under way. And the critics who promoted it – not only Russian critics, but the most influential ones – were quick to emphasize its distinctiveness. The young Dmitrii Pisarev explained in 1861:

> The English have Dickens, Thackeray, and [George] Eliot, but they also have John Stuart Mill; the French have journalists and socialists as well as novelists. But in Russia the whole sum of ideas about society, about the human personality, about social and family relations, is concentrated in fiction and in the criticism of fiction; we do not have

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> an independent moral philosophy, we do not have a social science, and so we must look for all of this in literary works. . . . Many of our writers have become writers only because they could not become social figures or political writers; and as for those who are genuine artists by vocation, they too have been obliged to become journalists in some aspect of their writing activity.

Nikolai Chernyshevsky had made essentially the same point six years before, but with an important added emphasis. For precisely those reasons, he wrote:

> . . . literature plays a greater role in our intellectual life than French, German or English literatures play in the life of their respective countries, *and it bears greater responsibilities than the literature of any other nation*. Russian literature still expresses the entire intellectual life of the people; hence it has *the direct duty* to take an interest in the kind of subject matter that elsewhere has passed into the special competence of other branches of intellectual activity. [my italics – D. F.]

When the outside world began to read the Russians, it did so on the same assumptions. Thus the Vicomte de Vogüé, in his pioneering book *Le Roman russe*, explained to his fellow Frenchmen in 1886:

> Philosophy, history, the elegance of the podium and the bar – not to mention the tribune – are genres absent from this young literature; what one finds in other countries under these arbitrary labels goes, in Russia, into the vast framework of poetry and the novel . . . the only [forms] compatible with the demands of a censorship formerly implacable and today still highly suspicious. Ideas pass only when concealed in the flexible threads of fiction; but there they all pass; and the fiction that shelters them takes on the importance of a doctrinal thesis.

It remained only for George Steiner, exactly ninety years later, to reduce this view to the stark formulation that "all of Russian literature is essentially political" because "it is produced and published, so far as it can be, in the teeth of ubiquitous censorship." There is some truth to the statement, but much less in the emphasis on writers' responses to censorship; what needs rather to be stressed is the effect of ubiquitous censorship on the reading of literature produced under those circumstances. The question is: political *to whom*, and *how*? Schooled by their

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social-minded critics, intelligentsia readers avidly scanned works of imagination for the sorts of messages they wanted to find there (in this they mimicked the censors), while the major writers were, by and large, pursuing quite a different set of agendas. It is, moreover, misleading to speak of censorship as a constant factor without distinguishing the nineteenth-century variety from its Soviet counterpart. Nineteenth-century censors removed from literary works what they thought should not be there, phrases deemed offensive to the official program of autocracy, orthodoxy, and nationalism. To their counterpart of those proscriptions, Soviet censors added a whole set of prescriptions; their overriding and much more intrusive concern with what *should be* there.

Still, Russian literature of the nineteenth century, as of the twentieth, has tended to be surrounded – at home and abroad – by an aura that might loosely be called political or (especially in the Soviet period) ideological. That fact underlies the enormous and continuing interest of French publishers and readers in literature from and about the Soviet Union, an interest unmatched by their American counterparts, for whom the intersecting myths about the Revolution and the avant-garde have a less compelling fascination. On the other hand, McCarthyism and its lingering aftermath had serious and still unstudied effects on the publishing and public discussion of literature from Soviet Russia: I refer not to the workings of simple anti-communism, but to the convolutions of anti-anti-communism in the thinking of many American intellectuals. In any case, the rise of the dissident movement in the late 60s only fostered a new political interest in writing – this time unofficial writing – from Russia.

The Double Standard: Belief in the singularity of Russian literature led, all but inevitably, to the operation of a double standard, sometimes unacknowledged, in assessing it. This was bound to occur, given the extreme claims made for Soviet literature as being *sui generis*. In 1934, for example, D.S. Mirsky supplied the chapter on Russia for an English book entitled *Tendencies of the Modern Novel*. There he insists that what sets Soviet literature apart are "its conscious purposefulness and its conscious coordination with a collective existence. . . . To understand what it is the Soviet novelists are doing, the non-Soviet reader must make at least some step towards understanding the new Socialist civilization that is growing in the Soviet Union. . . . If he approaches it as just another "national" literature, comparable to German, American, or French literature, he will find himself in the ridiculous position of a biologist who would study a bird from the point of view of its adaptiveness to the life of a fish."

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Mirsky wrote as a recent convert to Soviet Communism; his formula openly brands the sort of nuanced thinking that had distinguished his earlier work as irrelevant to the task of criticism. More independent but no less exemplary is Edmund Wilson's struggle with the double standard in a wartime article, "Leonid Leonov: The Sophistication of a Formula" (1944), reprinted in his book, *Classics and Commercials*. Using "sophistication" in its original sense of "adulteration," Wilson compares the Soviet writer Leonid Leonov's novel *Road to the Ocean* with émigre Mark Aldanov's *The Fifth Seal*. Ultimately he finds Aldanov superior, thanks to the "advantage of freedom: he can write what he observes and feels." But what is most striking is Wilson's agonized reluctance to reach that conclusion: "[To] consider the two books side by side . . . is to put to ourselves *problems about which it is rather difficult to arrive at any definite conclusions*. Is Aldanov 'better' than Leonov because he . . . can choose his effect and achieve it? . . . Or is Leonov 'better' than Aldanov, both because of his more abundant material *and because he has been able to associate himself with a great creative social purpose* [my italics – D. F.]?" After Stalin, of course, the "association" could as well be negative, as in the novels of Solzhenitsyn, Trifonov, Granin, Dudintsev, and *tutti quanti*. Of whatever kind, however, the consideration of the work of literature principally in terms of its cultural-political provenance and significance is what gives rise to what I am calling the double standard.

It prevailed, for sufficient and probably inescapable reasons, in American reviewing of Russian fiction and in American academic publications, just as it did in the reactions of the educated Russian reading public. I quote an excellent characterization of this process from last October's issue of the Moscow magazine *Znamia*:

> Earlier – let us be frank – there was a general excitement that came, as a rule, not so much from *the quality* of a work that 'everyone suddenly was talking about' as from the fact that that work had managed to get published, had managed to break through the powerful bureaucratic screens and barriers and by that very fact managed to challenge the autocratic regime with its pretensions to an undivided ideological and esthetic monopoly. The news of such a victory, of the fact that someplace someone had managed to print a word of truth, a word that differed from the official, spread across the country in a flash, often in advance of and sometimes in the stead of any direct acquaintance with the text. . . .
>
> Every publication of a work that was authentic, true, *or merely unofficial* was received as a breach in the Berlin wall. . . .
>
> Is it surprising that an author making his debut with a striking and honest book in fact had a chance of waking up to find himself

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> not only famous but an acknowledged authority . . . and that a journal that had month by month laid methodical siege to the ideological fortresses should become an unquestioned center of the spiritual, cultural, and public [*obshchestvennyj*] life of the country as a whole?

The author emphasizes "how much the literature of the thaw and the ensuing stagnation [of the Breznev years] owed to those who suppressed and hounded it," for the latter managed to surround it "with a halo of victimization and heroism that elevated writers who never aspired to the role into spiritual leaders of the nation." His conclusions take the form of uncomfortable questions, oriented as much toward the present and future situation of Russian culture as toward the past: "Was it literature as literature that our citizens needed [in this post-Stalin period]? Was it a love for good books that fueled this unquestionably universal passion for reading, which so unified the best energies of society?" Or was it hostility to the regime (conscious or unconscious)? Echoing Pisarev and Chernyshevsky, he asks: "When people turned to literature for the truth, that is, for reliable information about life, about the past, present and future, was it not because there were simply no other unsullied, unpoisoned sources of information?"

My point is that, to a considerable degree (and allowing for the vagaries of translation and publishing), our American reactions to postwar Russian literature paralleled the reactions of Russian readers in their ultimate dependence on "those who suppressed and hounded it." This can be seen, I think, even in the case of the major events of postwar Russian literature: *Doctor Zhivago*, the novels of Solzhenitsyn, the fiction of Andrei Siniavsky. (It may be less true in the case of the less well-known *Master and Margarita*, and less true still of Venedikt Erofeev's *samizdat* masterpiece, *Moskva-Petushki* – both because neither it nor its author was noisily suppressed, and because it appeared in two translations, neither of which came close to suggesting the extraordinary vitality of its language.) These hypotheses lead me to my third section.

Toward Normalization: *Perestroika* weakened the double standard, whose whole rationale proceeded to vanish with the disappearance of the Soviet Union, its cultural prescriptions, its Writers' Unions, its controlled printing presses, and its censors. (The censorship, which was brought out of the closet under *perestroika* and subsequently dismantled, had prohibited publication of the very word "censorship" soon after publication of the last law on the subject in 1931.

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Other prohibitions were listed in a volume called by those who worked with it "The Talmud"; the organizers of an exhibit on the subject, scheduled to open in the summer of 1992 at the Moscow Library of Foreign Literature, announced plans to include a copy of this elusive volume.) *The result is that the situation of Russian writers and readers in Russia now promises increasingly to resemble that of American writers and readers.* The process of "raising sunken ships," in Marietta Chudakova's phrase – that is, of publishing previously suppressed writers, works, themes, and styles – seems now to be nearing completion, and yielding to another process, that of "normalization" of the literary situation (for better or for worse) as we understand that word. Let me once again cite recent testimony from the Russian press.

In an article entitled "An Outline of the Crisis: The Socio-Cultural Situation and the Literary Process" in *Literaturnoe obozrenie* (Number 3, 1991), Alexsandr Ageev presents "a picture of the gradual *secularization and democratization*" of literature [my italics – D. F.]. In Russian literature today, he finds "a healthy, elemental process is taking place which I would call, by analogy with the currently fashionable term in economics, '*privatization*'." Though old mentalities may slow the process (because "the overwhelming majority of readers are not ready for the new relations with literature, and continue to look to it for final answers and authoritative chartings of goals"), it nonetheless promises to end the singularity that Chernyshevshy and others proclaimed. The new literature, Ageev finds, will operate "in its own discrete world, knowing that alongside it are [the worlds of] science, religion, and philosophy – not to speak of an enormous number of independent, rational individuals."

The other voice I would cite as symptomatic of the present condition of Russian literature is that of Sergei Chuprinin, who has set up as a leading advocate and analyst of "normalization." Three years ago he published in the journal of the Writers' Union, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, (no. 3, 1989), an article called "Out of Discord: Subjective Observations on the Literary Criticism of 1988," in which he declared:

> For so long we Russians have based our hopes on our "specialness," on the originality of our historical path and nature (at first religious, then governmental, then ideological, and finally ethnic) – and we've gotten so many lumps and black eyes thanks to those hopes – that it may well be time to stop, time to seek in ourselves, our soul and our culture not what sets us apart from the rest of the world, but rather what is common to all human beings no matter where they were born or where they find themselves living, whether in Moscow or Osaka, in Velsk or Chicago. I am convinced that our historical task

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> is not to present. . . Russia to the world (we've had our fill of doing that), but to try, while it's still not too late, to rejoin the world community, to share its burdens and joys, and, at last, to accept its laws, which apply to all humanity.

Now, in the magazine *Znamia* for October 1991, Chuprinin has an article called "Functioning Normally: Russian Literature After *Perestroika*," in which he refuses to be nostalgic for the time when certain writers claimed the attention of all readers and their works constituted events. That time ended, he says, in 1988; for three years since then, the press had been so full of previously suppressed works that one writer could quip, "These days it's more interesting to read than to live." Now, however, "books have ceased to be 'our everything,' because they have ceased to be the sole life-preserver for hundreds of thousands, perhaps for millions, wishing not to drown in the sea of ideological lies, social falsehoods, and everyday *poshlost*." Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* was "the last literary-social event." Now, "what everybody is talking about" may be "yesterday's TV broadcast, the sharp exchange between political leaders . . . or the latest program for saving Russia."

"The longed-for freedom – with no omissions, no prohibitions, nothing passed over in silence – has already been achieved," and one result has been the discovery that "the circle of those who value literature precisely as Literature is not so large." Andrei Vozenesensky had boasted, "America is strong in computers, Russia in readers." But the reading public is splintering: "It has become clear . . . that the previous unanimity among readers is no longer to be seen and that what is interesting, what constitutes an event for some, leaves others unmoved." In the time ahead, Chuprinin concludes, "there will be no books that are events for everybody; there will be bestsellers, and that is a very different matter." Russian literature has been "desacralized," and is now "a collective noun," designating a plurality of phenomena.

Recognizing the autonomy and plurality of literature is a new thing in Russian public discourse of the last sixty years, and we can expect large-scale consequences from it. We shall, for instance, be seeing new histories of Russian literature, and the constitution of a new canon. On the other hand, much of the good and useful writing of the Soviet period, having lost its surplus value, will – like the good and useful writing of other countries, and of the post-Soviet period – soon be forgotten by all but the occasional sociologist or antiquarian. And the subjection of literature to market forces can be counted on to produce a whole range of concretely pernicious results, alongside the abstractly laudable ones.

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But history holds out grounds for optimism, too, in that earlier "normalization" of Russian literature that began exacly a hundred years ago. I have in mind the decades that bracketed the turn of the century, when the so-called Golden Age of Russian literature had plainly ended, and when disoriented readers were struggling to make their peace with that, and with the new ("decadent" "symbolist," anti-realistic) writing that was coming to replace it. Then, too, there was a radical shift away from the intelligentsia reader; alarm in some quarters at "pornography," at the "breakup" (*raspad*) of literature, at all manner of "unhealthy" or "elitist" tendencies, at the burgeoning of pulp literature and the appearance of new and separate reading publics. Yet it all marked a period of great literary flowering and renewal, which came to be known as "the Silver Age." Allowing for all the differences between then and now, it may nevertheless be appropiate – let us *hope* it is appropriate – to close on that hopeful note.

I think I will follow Susan Sontag's example in asking whether any of the panelists wish to make any remarks first. If not, are there any questions, or comments disguised as questions, from the audience?

Question: I have a question provoked largely by Professor Fanger's wide-ranging talk, but I think it also touches on a number of other things. Saul Bellow made a distinction between the writer and intellectual, the intellectual as the system-builder, the writer as the man who is moved much more by internal prompting and who responds to those promptings. Some years ago I attended a conference in Philadelphia on the subject, "The Social Responsibility of the Writer," Various American writers and Czeslaw Milosz, who, one might say, is an American writer now too, attended. I found very interesting the deference that these writers paid to Mr. Milosz and the fact the these writers were much more concerned with the heroic role of the writer than with the role that Mr. Bellow articulated as being the writer's essential one. At that conference, the writer as someone who confronts social forces, speaking for humanity, was played up. To one question from a writer, Mr. Milosz answered that, yes, he had undertaken this role in his lifetime but had done so very reluctantly. He would have been happier to simply write poems without having to deal with the various terrible moral responsibilities that had been given to him.

I was struck by Professor Fanger's comments about the role of the Russian writer here, and I wonder now whether this heroic conception of the writer isn't something particularly American in nature. Do we look too much in the United States for the writer to lead the charge against the forces of reaction and inhumanity? Do we not take seriously

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enough the notion that, after all, what writers do best is to write from their own experiences, from their inner voices?

Donald Fanger: Ideally, Saul Bellow, and others who are not only academics but have credentials as writers, ought to comment on your question, rather than myself. I don't really think it is my and other academics' place to answer authoritatively; on the other hand it is our place to be tempted to answer this. I suspect that any Western, American writer – and this was mentioned in yesterday's opening remarks – must to some extent envy those dissident writers who, by virtue of the fact that they are writers, are invested with heroic status. It is because dissidence has deep moral resonances, because it offers satisfactions, at a terrible price to be sure, of a kind which are not available offered to contemporary American writers. I suspect that it's an extension, into a moral and a social dimension, of what fame can mean. And who, dreaming about fame, would not welcome its extension into such a moral domain?

Michael Heim: It seems to me what you heard at that conference in Philadelphia was something very natural. You heard each side hoping that it could do what the other side did. It makes perfect psychological sense.

Question: Professor Laqueur, would you care to comment on the ambiguity of Bertold Brecht's comments on the great purge, that the more innocent they are the more they deserve to die? My second question concerns the ambiguity surrounding the death of Willi Münzenberg the left wing publisher.

Walter Laqueur: I'm sorry. I cannot comment on Brecht's observation, since I am not familiar with it. As for the ambiguity about the murder of Münzenberg – that is a very sad detective story. Münzenberg was a lapsed member and leader of the German Communist party, a great publisher who broke with the Party in 1935 or so. While trying to escape to Spain in 1940, he allegedly committed suicide. Whether he really committed suicide or not is not clear. Within the several last years, two or three biographies of Münzenberg have been published. Two have reached the conclusions that he did commit suicide, and the third one said perhaps he died by other means. It is really a very sad and inconclusive story.

Donald Fanger: Thank you all.

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Intellectuals as Leaders

Alex Boyd: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Director of the Newark Public Library, and I want to welcome all of you. We are pleased to be able to cooperate in presenting this important public program. We share the goal of bringing the humanities before the public so that they might broaden our understanding of current issues and events in our society. We salute the National Endowment for the Humanities and the New Jersey Committee for the Humanities, and others, for their support of our endeavors here today. Please note that the library has made every effort to build on this conference; we have put together a series of events that focus on the history and culture of Central Europe. If you have not already reviewed our exhibits "Central Europe: Enduring Land of Change and Contrast," please do so during the reception. All the prints, posters and notable books are from our extensive collections here at the library. Also you will note on the program that we have scheduled a number of performances during the month of April on the theme of Central Europe. These efforts present the culture of Central Europe to our general public in Newark. We are generously supported by the Prudential Insurance Company of America.

I would like now to turn the program over to Edith Kurzweil, organizer of this conference and your moderator for this afternoon's program.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much for this nice introduction. Let me assure you already that we are all very happy to be here. The participants have asked me about the history of this marvelous building and have expressed their admiration for it. We will start with Richard Pipes.

Richard Pipes: I will talk about Andrei Sakharov, who was a scientist; if I'm not mistaken, my remarks will be the only ones delivered at this conference devoted to a single individual rather than on a broader subject. This is indicative of the unique importance of Andrei Sakharov as a symbol of intellectual resistance to political terrorism.

The first and lasting impression that Andrei Sakharov made on me was one of modesty. He seemed entirely unaware of his fame and the interest others had in him. This in itself is not especially remarkable, because all the truly great men and women that I have met – great in the spiritual and moral sense of the word – have been distinguished by modesty. Modesty is almost the *sine qua non* of greatness, because it reflects

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one's sense of proportion, an awareness of one's own insignificance in this world not of our making.

But Sakharov's modesty was of a special kind, on a different, higher level, because he almost seemed unaware of his "self," of his "identity," which was fully merged with the causes which he espoused: the cause of human rights – specific human rights, not general human rights – the cause of law, the cause of peace. He had about him a childish innocence, and one felt he was just as immune to flattery as he was to threats. This was a tremendous source of strength for him, because if you look closely at the means which the Communist regime employed to bring people into line, they consisted of either flattery (employed very heavily with regard to foreigners) or of fear (used toward people under its control). If you were, as he was, immune to flattery and impervious to fear, you were invulnerable, and I think this was so exasperating to the regime. He was really a sainted person, the only saint I have ever met. Even so, I'm somewhat dismayed that there is a kind of cult of "St. Andrei" in Russia today, because even though he fully deserves this, he would be the first to denounce it, since it runs so contrary to his modesty.

What surprises about Sakharov's biography is that there was nothing in his early background to indicate that he would be a future revolutionary and a moral beacon of his age. He came from a very comfortably situated family; his father was a prominent professor of physics. He had a wonderful education. He made very early a superb career as a scientist, then reaped all the rewards, as well as advantages – material and otherwise – available to a Soviet scientist. As far as I can judge, his early opinions were very conventional, and as most scientists do, he showed little interest in political and social issues. Scientists in general have not been distinguished, especially in Russia, as fighters for civic rights, preferring to withdraw into the laboratory. Traditionally in Russia, the cause of freedom has been taken up mostly by those individuals whom Mr. Bellow described yesterday as "writers," that is, humanists rather than scientists or technocrats. What is so amazing about Sakharov's biography, then, is not only the fact that he was a scientist, but that his most of his close associates were scientists as well.

Now, how this scientist, one of the greatest of our century (so I'm told by people competent to judge) developed into a political activist, we know from his own words. In his memoirs he writes that what first made him conscious of a sense of public responsibility was fear of radioactive contamination from nuclear testing. In 1957, he began quietly to wage within the establishment a struggle for the suspension of nuclear tests. In 1961, he approached Khrushchev, badgering him about the need to suspend nuclear testing. He recalls how Khrushchev told him to mind his own business, that though he might be a great scientist, he under-

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stood nothing about politics, and that to the Americans strength alone counted. Frustrated in his efforts, Sakharov decided to wage his battle politically but still within the system. It was his frustrating inability to influence Soviet nuclear policy, particularly on the matter of testing, that led him, according to his own words, to develop a feeling "of impotence and fright."

In 1973 came the breaking point, when after much agony, Sakharov decided that it was impossible to work within the system and that he had to go public and challenge Soviet policy. Other factors contributed: according to his memoirs, he began to read about the history of Stalinism. This literature had a great influence on him, because he came to realize that the reason he was frustrated in his effort to stop nuclear testing and the arms race had to do with the systemic flaws of the regime, rather than with the incomprehension or ill will of its current leaders. This realization led him to acknowledge the importance of human rights, the importance of law, the importance of Russia becoming part of the world.

Going public did him no good, either. He was immediately criticized by the Soviet media and soon fell into its disfavor. When a Swedish correspondent, to whom he told his story for the first time for the benefit of the West, asked him why he engaged in such futile endeavors, Sakharov responded, "Well, there is a need to create ideals even when you can't see any path by which to achieve them. If there are no ideals, there can be no hope, and then one would be completely in the dark." He adhered to this view in spite of the prevailing opinion in the West that we had to be "realistic" in dealing with Moscow, proving that sometimes idealism is the highest form of realism.

The amazing thing about Sakharov is, as I mentioned before, that both he and all his principal supporters were scientists: Valerii Chalidze, Iurii Orlov, and Andre Tverdokhlebov, all three physicists; Kronid Liubarskii, an astrophysicist; and Sergei Kovalëv, a biologist. This is unique, certainly in the history of Russia; the fight had always been waged by those we call intellectuals and not scientists. When one thinks about this puzzle, several explanations come to mind. An obvious one is that scientists enjoyed under the Communists privileges that writers did not. Writers were considered by the regime to be expendable, and if they did challenged the system, they would be immediately arrested, whereas Sakharov was immune for a long time, and only when he persisted was he punished. Furthermore, a powerful factor is that scientists in the Soviet Union, even under Stalin, were permitted to think rationally and to deal with rules of evidence the way their colleagues did in the West. There was a Soviet literature different from ours, but there was no So-

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viet physics different from physics in the West, so that physicists felt themselves part of the world-wide community, applied the same methods, and hoped to arrive at the same results. It is the application of these methods to political issues, once they arose in the minds of Sakharov and his colleagues, that led to these astonishing results.

Sakharov and his collaborators took a path very different from that normally trodden by the Russian intelligentsia, which believed law to be a weapon of the ruling class. Intellectuals had borne much responsibility for what had happened to Russia during the past seventy years. It was they who transformed what was in 1917 a rebellion of peasants and workers and a soldiers' mutiny into a revolution. I believe I have studied the materials on the Russian Revolution as much as anybody alive today, and I found no desire for revolution on the part of the common people. Common people rebel; they don't make revolutions. They rebel almost always, and not only in Russia but in other societies, for a return to the past and the restoration of rights of which they feel themselves unjustly deprived. The American revolutionaries fought for their rights as Englishmen, of which they thought they had been robbed. They weren't looking to create a radically new society. To an extent, this was true in France, and certainly this was true in Russia. It is the intellectuals who fan the flames of rebellion into a revolution. It was the intellectuals who created this monstrous system that ultimately consumed them as well. I believe that this particular tradition of intellectuals conceiving abstract rational schemes for remaking humanity has been ultimately discredited by the failure of Communism and is unlikely to haunt us in the foreseeable future.

The problem of the intellectuals today is very different, and this is where Sakharov comes in. Sakharov had no idea how to remake society, except for the incorporation of certain basic principles, such as human rights and law. He fought for freedom, and so did his supporters: that is, not for the opportunity to change society but to give people the chance to be themselves. And in that sense, the intellectuals who have helped liberate Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, where Sakharov has been one of the leaders, have shown us that the mission of intellectuals henceforth is going to be very different from the traditional one. In my personal view, it will not be to change mankind but, rather, to protect mankind from those who want to change it.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Adam Zagajewski.

Adam Zagajewski: I would much prefer to read poems to you, but it seems to be forbidden. I will just read my paper. Eight years ago, Milan Kundera published his famous essay, "The Tragedy of Central Europe,"

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which, with the usual Central European skill, reversed established values and out of weakness and instability made an enviable virtue. By then, we writers born in fragile countries represented a fabulous, legendary, and nonexisting continent. Journalists from real countries looked at us half-ironically, half with respect due to the unknown quantities. We could claim that nowhere else on this planet were books being so avidly read, paintings so attentively looked at, theater performances attended, prayers uttered, unselfish deeds produced.

Now it's all over. Now it's all about money and nationalism. Writers, who once represented mythical entities, now represent just themselves. I welcome this development enthusiastically; it suits me well. What's mythical and visionary hasn't ceased to exist; it has returned to where it belongs: to poetry, instead of nourishing political illusions. Just one thing has become more problematic: literary conferences.

Who are we writers, those of us who have not entered the administration of new, transitional democracies? Now we represent just our books, our past and future, our mistakes and *bon mots*. And – as far as political struggle against bad, oppressive systems is concerned – we have turned into historians who can dwell on their remembrances for decades. I don't want to be misunderstood; I am not sneering at the historical function of literature, quite the contrary. But we are no longer oracles. We are writers, lonely and slightly comical figures, fighting with white sheet of paper, exactly like our colleagues from Australia and Italy, San Marino and Andorra.

Still, I represent a few things in the same way every individual represents a larger body. I am a part of my generation, for instance. I was born in 1945, in the middle of the Dark Ages. We – as a generation – were submitted to the worst possible education, exposed to this little, stupid philosophy called Marxism, convinced for a short while that there was nothing but Marx and Engels and Tchapaev. For my generation, political opposition meant also an alternative process of education, where our literary masters were not only Kafka or Borges, but also and even more importantly, Dante and Plato. Saying this, I am aware that in my country of Poland the scope of accessible non-Zhdanovian books and ideas was much bigger than in other provinces of the late Soviet empire. But I am also saying this because I realize how wonderful the liberation from the nightmare of Communism is, and how irresponsible it would be to claim in all seriousness that it is all about money and nationalism. It is also about returning to the mainstream of human experience and education as Europe knew it and produced it.

Are intellectuals leaders? Intellectuals – who are they? Writers, philosophers, sociologists, scientists produce books, ideas, appeal to dif-

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ferent sensibilities, praise opposite values. Are they leaders? Whom do they lead? The last three years or so seem to prove that they lead just themselves. Major intellectuals are leaders of minor intellectuals, minor ones impress lesser ones, lesser ones influence university students. We in Central Europe used to be so proud of the civil society – *société civile* – as we have rebaptized the old notion of intelligentsia. We called *société civile* the better, that is, the oppositional part of the intelligentsia, and we believed there were direct links between this little but excellent intellectual army and the global population. This turned out not to be true. There were no mechanisms of transmission between the mountains of intellect and plains of common sense and cunning.

I am the last person who would try to reduce works of human spirit to political significance. When reading poems of the Czech poet Vladimir Holan, for instance, I realize that they contain metaphors which are like traces of wounds inflicted upon the poet by the Stalinist regime. And so I prefer poems written by victims of bad political systems to poems whose authors pretend to take the lead of the society. In books written within bad political systems I admire most the delicate balance between the cold wind of persecution and the quiet resistance of imagination, that almost extraterrestrial agency of mind.

Still, there are great writers who seem to have too much spiritual energy and therefore are able to fill two lives, two destinies, play two roles: the one of the artist and the one of the intellectual leader. It is a phenomenon that doesn't occur every day, but when it does the usual laws of literary economics seem to be largely surpassed and dwarfed. In the case of Poland, I see in recent decades two such giants – Czeslaw Milosz and Witold Gombrowicz. Before I start to comment in a more detailed way on their work and their influence, let me turn for a moment to that large part of the intelligentsia which was obedient and even servile. It shouldn't be forgotten, especially in the chapter of the intellectual history of our century, though politically speaking, I am resolutely against any obsessive witch-hunt. Western readers know and admire – and rightly so – Mandelstam and Akhmatova but ignore of course hundreds of minor writers, thousands of minor sociologists, eager and bad painters, and especially sculptors, who profited joyfully from all those grandiose monuments which recently have become manometers of the crowds' anger.

I knew a philosopher who tried to combine the subtlety of Husserl's phenomenology with the bold insights of Lenin's demagogy. I knew a talented poet who became an official in the Polish branch of Komsomol and never recovered from this experience. I knew another philosopher who in a sort of non-Kierkegaardian leap made up his mind and took a job in the secret police office. (I don't need to tell you that secret police

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officers were much better paid than philosophy teachers.) I witnessed once a Swedish poet entering a crowded coffeehouse in Stockholm and saying hello to his friends, some of them whom he hadn't seen for years. I envied him: for me, entering a crowded coffeehouse in Krakow full of my friends would have been a painful thing – so many of my early literary companions had crossed the borderline and were working for the censorship office or the Party or even the secret police.

I reread recently Canetti's famous novel *Auto da fe* and was struck by how false – at least in one respect – this parable is. The main character, as you will remember, Peter Kien, stands for the intellectual figure of our time. His aloofness, his sublimity, from the real world, his interest in the old Chinese culture, made him totally blind to the events of his time. He symbolically walled up the windows in his penthouse so as to receive light only from the skylight. Now, if you look at the German, Russian, French, and Polish intellectuals who lived in the Dark Ages of our century, aloofness was the rarest of vices. Conformity and eagerness to please the actual ruler were much more common.

Hannah Arendt mentions somewhere a German classicist who translated *Mein Kampf* into Greek, who did so not being compelled by anyone. "Der Mensch ist eine liquide Masse," "The human being is a liquid," said another Austrian novelist, Robert Musil. Ninety percent of Polish dissidents of the older generation were ex-Stalinists. Again I don't begrudge them it politically, just philosophically. Absolute intellectual integrity is rare, though it exists, and I would be able to quote a few names to prove it. We don't need to go China to find it: Hofmannsthal in his diary tells a story of a Chinese man who impassively read a book standing in a long line of people who were going to be beheaded. A German officer – this was during the Boxer Uprising – saw it and liberated the man, who closed his book and went away.

If I am slightly skeptical about the moral qualities of intellectuals – and so many other examples can be quoted, the political terror produced by French leftist intellectuals in the fifties, among other things – it is because I am not sure intellectuals should exert political power. Haven't we tried it with Lenin, Plekhanov, Bukharin and Radek?

I am not the first one to have noticed that – generally and roughly speaking – democracy encourages rather all kinds of epistemological reflection. How has something been said, how do media operate, what are the numerous distortions of truth, how does man's voice differ from woman's voice, how can we make sure that new categories of social groups gain access to education, how are we to allow different beliefs to coexist on the same territory without bloodshed – these questions are democratic preoccupations. The democratic thinker is a skeptic. He or

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she sometimes even tries not to believe too much in what he or she believes, in order avoid violent clashes of opinions. He or she adores structuralism or poststructuralism, dreams about the nature of language, is interested in how things are, not what they are, how things are made, not by whom. The intellectual is generally a how-person, not a what-person.

Again, speaking extremely roughly and risking simplification – totalitarianism produces a situation of a split where ninety-five percent of intellectuals obediently serve the dictator and five percent are prone to ontological quest. Not how we perceive the world and ourselves but what the world is, what we are, what poetry is, and sometimes even what God is – those are the dissidents' preoccupations. Here the truth is not discussed, sneered at, dissected, but rather looked for. These dissidents seem to live in a pre-Kantian epoch. They seem to need those rich and hard questions in order to withstand the heavy pressure of the powerful and merciless state. Also, they apparently do not need all this sophisticated apparatus of epistemological cunning, of deconstruction and analysis, which befits the democratic skeptic. The lie of the totalitarian state is so obvious and primitive that no excessive technique of mental detective work seems to be required on behalf of dissidents. (There are, though, some monumental works of anti-totalitarian epistemology, such as Klemperer's *Lingua Tertii Imperii*.) The silence of oppression does offer – to the happy few – the slim possibility of a silent vision not only pre-Kantian but also pre-Weberian, in the sense of Weber's argument about the end of magic in the modern industrial world.

The first, second, and third time I was in the West, I was struck by the subtle difference in sensibilities of Western and Eastern intellectuals, which was not reduced to the political cleavage between the left and the anti-Communist stance. No, I would define the difference to the opposition between a more epistemological and a more ontological attitude, between asking "Is truth possible at all?" and asking "Where is truth?"

You probably think I side completely with the ontological attitude and disdain the epistemological one. But it is much more complex; I like the seriousness of the "ontological" quest in literature, in art, in thinking. The problem with the ontological sensibility is that once your quest seems to be successful, you are ready to defend fanatically your position. Ontology makes us tolerate little or even be completely intolerant. The democratic sensibility, ridden by self-doubt and skepticism, has at least the wonderful capacity of leaving space for other thinkers, other beliefs, other doubts. Almost everything in Central and Eastern Europe looks like the fruit of ontological sensibility. Even nationalism can be interpreted as the ontology of little souls, poor spirits, though you may

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remember that for Oswald Spengler nationalism amounted to a highly aristocratic creed.

Now, tired of my general statements, I turn again to literature and to those writers whose names I mentioned earlier, Czeslaw Milosz and Witold Gombrowicz. I won't even try to pretend that they have been intellectual leaders of the nation in a big way. Milosz, before he got the Nobel Prize, was read by a tiny elite of *belle esprits*. Gombrowicz hasn't had a much larger following. Still, both of them influenced, at times more or less directly, the thinking habits of the intelligentsia.

Witold Gombrowicz – so far two volumes of his diary have been translated into English – was a writer and thinker of largely epistemological interests. I say "writer and thinker" since he had a penchant for theorizing; he forged the notion of form, of which he was very proud. He claimed in the sixties, "I was the first structuralist. . . . " But actually he was rather an anti-structuralist: form was the shaper of everything from the language to human behavior like a gigantic *gestalt*, perceived by Gombrowicz as a huge prison, as an enslaving device from which we should escape as energetically as possible. One of the examples of the enslaving action of form was for Gombrowicz the circumstance of his being a Pole. He incessantly lampooned the petrified, degraded, artificial condition of being a Pole: every Pole a hero, every Pole a Chopin or a Copernicus, every Pole a poor count. And yet, to his Argentinean friends, Gombrowicz himself was "this starving Polish aristocrat." For Gombrowicz, Poland was an easy target; two hundred years of a stateless existence had produced plenty of psychological fictions. What is amazing is that he succeeded in redefining the definition of being a Pole. He changed the self-image of Poles, at least of the reading Poles. But, of course, his epistemology was larger than that. He dreamed of a culture based upon truth, not upon rhetoric, bombast, posure.

Gombrowicz's influence as a writer and as an intellectual leader was at its peak in the seventies. By then he was still half-forbidden, half-tolerated, which is an ideal situation for an author. It is interesting, though, that in the eighties when severe martial law was declared in Poland, the influence of Gombrowicz among the intelligentsia subsided – he didn't seem to be a writer for hard times. He was too critical, too skeptical, much too epistemological.

Was it Milosz then, the ontological Milosz, who satisfied the demands of Polish readers, avidly looking for a spiritual master? Not really. There are readers who would follow with the greatest attention every new line written by Milosz; that is obvious. But if we talk about intellectual leaders, then Milosz was such a leader for few; he was not a popular writer. He was always too difficult, too complex for the masses,

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for the traditionally-minded patriots, for priests and nurses, for militant Solidarity activists and hysterically hyperactive university students.

He is an "ontological" writer whose vision has metaphysical horizons. In his fascinating autobiography, *The Native Realm*, he offers us his own definition of himself, his philosophical hesitation and evolution as being situated between the Hegelian movement and the immobile being of a Parmenides. So there is no epistemological temptation for him; the pendulum swings between the two poles of the ontological planet, between fascination with the impetus of history and the joy of stillness, of immobility, of a peaceful Alsatian village, as in his beautiful poem, "Mittelbergheim."

In the seventies, as if reacting to the super-epistemological trend engendered both by fashionable French methodologies and by Gombrowicz, Milosz wrote his "Land of Ulro," which is in his oeuvre the absolute summit of ontological passion. No wonder that Gombrowicz figures here on the black list. He is one of the main culprits of Milosz's essay. For Gombrowicz, says Milosz, a human beings is like an onion. There is no hard core, no metaphysical center, just an infinite number of illusions.

"Land of Ulro" goes farther than that. It is a courageous metaphysical treatise claiming that imagination – this power station of poetry – is not just an excuse for not using more dangerous words. It seems that in modern usage "imagination" is a result of a silent compromise between poets and society. Yes, says the society, you can employ the word "imagination," but you shouldn't inquire what imagination is, and you should abstain from uttering words like "spiritual," "inner life" and "metaphysics." Milosz broke the agreement and pronounced all the forbidden words. Nevertheless "Land of Ulro" is not a political book, though once or twice even the most forbidden word "theocracy" makes a cameo appearance in it. Politically speaking, "Land of Ulro" can be seen as a metaphysical literary manifesto, reinforcing and encouraging the ontological tendency and longing in the spiritual attitude of Central European dissidents.

Milosz the poet, Milosz the thinker, and Milosz the intellectual leader represent a very rare combination of radically ontological and religious interests – which would otherwise be linked to a conservative if not rightist political stance – fused with democratic, liberal, and very vocal anti-nationalistic political views. This is a salutary, original, and stereotype-breaking combination, opening new prospects for younger generations. Milosz, by the way, is very active as a critic of the expansion of the Catholic Church in Poland and is an outspoken enemy of the new nationalism in Central Europe. In the seventies he reacted against what he considered exaggerated epistemological trends. Now, in recent

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years, he has castigated the political greed of nationalists and the religious institution trying to overinfluence Polish society.

I'm not trying to establish a new literary or political theory here. By identifying the ontological and epistemological features of literature, I mean just different stresses, different accents, not two totally different species. Still, I think there is something in the air, both in the rarified air of high culture and in the lower atmosphere of political movements, that justifies this distinction and perhaps helps to understand why some phenomena that were positive and hopeful under the Communist system can turn into hideous or at least menacing developments in the new era. Milosz's poems are widely read and acclaimed in this country. Perhaps we should encourage publishing in Central Europe some of the epistemologically-minded books that have been written here.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much. We now go to Dubravka Ugresic.

Dubravka Ugresic: The title of my remarks is "Parrots and Priests," and I will begin with a quotation I came across by Osip Mandelstam, from his *Fourth Prose*, which echoes nicely what I want to speak about:

> A writer is a mixed breed of parrot and priest. He is a parrot in the loftiest sense of the word. He speaks French if his master is French, but sold in Persia he will speak Persian: "Polly is a fool," or "Polly wants a cracker." A parrot knows no age, nor can he tell day from night. If he begins to bore his master, he is covered over with a black cloth, and that, for literature, is the surrogate of night.

I want to recount a humorous coversation I had recently with my colleague, countryman, and fellow writer Petar Petrovic, who, thinking aloud, said to me, "I wish I could at least be a Czech or a Hungarian – if I can't be an Englishman or an American."

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"It's my last name."

"I don't see . . . "

"If it at least began with a *K* . . . that would help."

"What!"

"I could hook up to Kundera, Konrad, Klima . . . "

"If you were named Krleza or Kis, that would be good," I said.

"It would make a real difference . . . " nodded my colleague.

"How about changing your name?"

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"To what?"

"Oh, I don't know, let's say to Kefka. That begins with *K*," I suggested gingerly.

"Hmm, Kafka, Kefka . . . not bad,". murmured my colleague and countryman, Petar Petrovic.

As I nod sympathetically, the simple thought comes to me that one can choose a great many things, as a rule: friendships, one's way of life, often even one's death, the country where one will live (if one has to), even one's last name (if it comes to that). But there are some things one can't choose: one's birth and one's colleagues.

The comic exchange I had with my friend happened quite recently, although it might as easily have taken place some time ago. The Yugoslav writer never took refuge under the umbrella of "Central Europe" as his cultural milieu or myth, his yearnings or dreams, his cultural trademark. (Yet in this age of literary marketing, why not?) How could he have, when he was brought up since 1948 with the conviction that we the Yugoslavs were something quite different from them, the Czechs, Hungarians, Poles, as was abundantly confirmed in reality: we could take our passports and buy coffee in Trieste and laundry detergent in Graz, and they couldn't. And so this Central European identity slipped away from the Yugoslavian writer. Now my friend Petar Petrovic sees with a bit of envy that he is not there among them. He looked around, only to find that everything was in its place. He had Krleza, he had Kis, and Europe was, in the final analysis, his cultural home.

And then those Westerners, always ready to invent labels, fabricated "Eastern Europe" and shoved Petrovic together with the Romanians, the Bulgarians. With the Bulgarians?! With consternation Petrovic leafs through a foreign anthology on "Eastern Europe," containing Yugoslavia. On the title page is a photograph of tired gray people waiting in line for sauerkraut in Bucharest. "But I didn't wait in lines!" he objects.

Then it started. Everything happened too fast. The Berlin Wall fell, and the Central European identity slipped away from Petrovic. "It's all because of the Italian coffee," he growls. The coffee may not have given him the feeling of being an Italian, but it surely distinguished him from any Bucharest.

"That's all right. I'm a Yugloslav, that's what I've always been anyway," he thinks with resignation. But it all started again. Like a magic beanstalk, the Berlin Wall began to grow in his country. His Yugoslavia – which he had never really made sense of, articulated, valued – fell apart, too.

At this moment, bullets are whistling above Petrovic's head; cities are falling down before his eyes; people are getting killed. He murmurs, "But

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that's not me, that isn't my country, that can't be my life, I'm a translator of Rilke and Proust, a writer of hermetic poetry . . . " And he checks his own reality in the foreigh newspapers. In *Newsweek* he sees a photograph of a woman. She is carrying in one hand a plastic bag with a harmless-looking leek sticking out; in the other hand she carries a gun. Underneath the photo is the caption, "Yugoslav National Costume." "No, that can't be!" cries a shocked Petrovic. Suddenly he feels that he is disappearing, reduced to a statistic, to a first and last name. Can a first and last name be – one's identity?

"Yes, it can," say the Great Manipulators, already standing behind Petrovic. "That is your identity. Petrovic the Serb is quite different from Petrovic the Croatian. Make up your mind who you are!"

Petrovic stands on the boundary between before and after, between one time and another, one reality and another, or one utopia and another, between the past and the future – and he trembles. He sees clearly: those who stand staring on the boundary as he does seem to be disappearing; those who make up their minds seem to be buying tickets to the future, on the Balkan Express.

Present-day industries of happiness function according to the magic formula of before and after. Before is, of course, always worse; after, of course, always better. The world is always moving towards the optimum variant. Tried and true formulas rarely fail. Let's leave our colleague Petrovic for a moment and ask how it really was – before.

Yugoslav literature was created in relative freedom, although the word "freedom" sounds old-fashioned and somehow false to those who throw around concepts from the vocabulary of East European clichés like Communism, Iron Curtain, censorship, repression, totalitarianism, socialist realism. Contemporary Yugoslav literature was relatively unencumbered by imposed aesthetic and ideological norms. After the break in political relations with the Soviet Union in 1948, the doors to normative socialist realism and the import of Soviet culture closed, without ever having really been opened. There were, of course, certain forbidden topics, but they did not form part of a system of norms. Even these taboos were soon lifted. The year 1971 and the repression in Croatia that it brought showed that only one serious prohibition remained in Yugoslav literature – nationalism. At the time it was colored with different meaning and treatment.

Since there was no official culture in Yugoslavia (which did not exclude the existence of official cultural figures), there could be no natural opposite, underground or alternative culture, such as flourished in the other socialist countries, either. All in all, a Yugoslav writer rarely had the opportunity to be a dissident, or at least not the same kind and not

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as often as in the other socialist countries. The Yugoslav intellectual never had the special importance that the intellectual traditionally has had in Russian culture. The socialist cliché "the workers, peasants, and honest intelligentsia" long ago placed the intellectual on the periphery, and that is where he has stayed. The Yugoslav writer has rarely been called upon to be the voice of the people. Those writers of the small peoples on the soil of Yugoslavia lost that role in the nineteenth century and have never really wanted, or been given the opportunity, to get it back.

The contemporary Yugoslav writer also has been free from the tradition of so-called great literature. He couldn't call upon a Tolstoy, or throw a Tolstoy off the steamship of modernity, simply because he didn't have one. Conscious that he belonged to the "small" literatures, he worked free from the obligation to create the equivalent of the great Russian novel or the great American one. Noevertheless, there are Yugoslavian novels that are great. The Yugoslav writer has stood apart from the laws of the literary marketplace, the phenomenon we call the publishing industry. He could not count on his own lawless, disorganized domestic market, and he didn't even think of counting on a foreign market. Thus, he has been free from the attention of the world. Now and then it would shine like a spotlight on some politically, commercially, or artistically interesting literature that was Russian, or Czech, but Yugoslav literature remained outside its focus.

The contemporary Yugoslav writer worked, conscious of his unimportance in his own culture and outside of it; he wrote in Europe but on its margin, in the East but on its edge. His social life was unprivileged, but his literary one was full of privilege. For only in a lawless, marketless, and unarticulated culture could there be such astonishingly unprovincial gestures: abundant translations of books which would not appear in market-oriented cultures; luxurious editions of books whose publication would be impossible except in a confused, semiliterate, and at the same time highly literate culture. Only in a spendthrift country caught in the confusion between Communism and capitalism could books be printed that didn't pay their way, that cost more to produce than to buy. From a purely literary point of view, the Yugoslav writer lived like a rich pauper. He lived in a common cultural space of different traditions and languages that intermixed and intercommunicated. For the writer, this meant knowing Latin and Cyrillic alphabets, reading Serbian, Croatian, Macedonia, and Slovene writers. It meant living in Zagreb, having a publisher in Belgrade, printing a book in Sarajevo, having readings in Ljubljana, Skopje, Prishtina. It meant living in different cultures and feeling they were his own.

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Yet at this moment, the peoples of ex-Yugoslavia are zealously assuring themselves and others that all that came before was a lie, a utopia, an Atlantis that did not exist. They say, "Nothing like that ever existed, because, if it had, what has come after never could have happened." This is why my friend Petrovic, stuck on the imaginary boundary, asks in his confusion whether he exists.

What, after all, did happen? Affirming that Yugoslavia was nothing but a great lie of a utopia, the Great Manipulators and their well-equipped teams of writers, journalists, sociologists, political scientists, psychiatrists, philosophers – thus of our colleagues as well as of military generals – began the process of dismantling the great lie. At first it was easy. They accused the Communist regime of every evil, of manipulating the masses. Then they threw out the old ideological vocabulary of ideas: brotherhood and unity, socialism and Titoism. They dismantled the old symbols, the hammer and sickle, the red star, the Yugoslav flag, the national anthem, the busts of Tito. They compiled a new vocabulary of ideological formulations: democracy, Europeanization, national sovereignty, post-Communism. They set up new symbols: parliament, flags, anthems. They changed the names of streets, squares, and cities. Then they moved into the same buildings, surrounded themselves with the same people – Communists transformed into democrats, democrats into nationalists, nationalists into liberals, liberals into conservatives. The Great Manipulators dismantled the old system and built a new one out of the same parts. And then they stopped to rest from their labors and saw that, behold, the country was still together!

So they turned to dismantling the country. The teams began the production of hatred, lies, insanity. They offered a new utopia of the nation. To awaken each sleeping national consciousness, they had to work quickly to ferret out the differences between each consciousness. It began as a gentle stock-taking, proceeded to more noticeable dividing, and then to branding – how else to mark cattle, to distinguish their herd from another's?

At first, the nervous stirring of the people was categorized as national homogenization. Then it took form as censuses of the population, followed by the more emotional shape of voluntary, public declarations by individuals. The words "ethnically pure" appeared in the media and in everyday life to describe clubs, work organizations, regions, and so on, opposed, of course, to "ethnically impure." They gave way to words like "dirty war" and "cleansing of the terrain." Every day, maps of Yugoslavia appeared with differently colored patches. People began to admit that what they had really wanted all along was to have their own special brand. The brands themselves took on more nuances,

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good Croats distinguished from bad ones, and so on. That minority of undeclared people who facetiously filled in the census form with "Toshiba" or "Mercedes" was greatly mistaken. There was nothing lighthearted about the red-hot national branding irons at work.

Not even the dead succeeded in escaping. Danilo Kis, the last Yugoslav writer, who upheld his Central European and Yugoslavian identity, who fled to Paris from the manipulators, did not escape. He was buried with full orthodox pomp, and his name is now waved like a national banner by those who had chased him out. The passionate necrophiliacs have torn to pieces the only Yugoslav Nobel laureate, the writer Ivo Andric. They beat upon their tribal drums with his bones until someone decided that Andric's monument in Visegrad should be torn down. In response, someone in Gospic tore down overnight the monument to Nikola Tesla, the Serbian inventor from Croatia. Monuments in Zagreb went up in the course of a few days to the Croatian writers Marija Juric-Zagorka and Tin Ujevic. As for Ivo Andric's bones, the Serbian tribe has dragged them over to its side.

Even the very well-known can't escape involvement. The Serbian writer Milorad Pavic, who had traveled the world explaining to the Jews that his Khazars were really Jews, dropped in on the Croatians to hint that the Khazars might have been Croatians, claimed to the Basques that the Khazars were none other than Basques. Today, after joyfully sliding into the Serbian warrior camp, Pavic explains to the world that the Khazars are simply Serbs, and along the way he gives a free advertisement to the Great Manipulator, the Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic. As is only right, the lesser writer serves the greater.

Foreigners don't get away, either. Milan Kundera made a remark in some newspaper and is now inscribed forever in Slovenian hearts as a Slovene. The half-Slovene Peter Handke was quoted and since then has been expunged forever from Slovenian hearts, perhaps also from Slovenian publishers' lists. George Konrad's words confused everyone. He will never be forgiven his refusal to take sides. Those who have temporarily fled the country, like myself, aren't free either. When I ran into a British colleague recently, he asked me what I was. I replied that I was a writer. He said, "What are you technically?"

I answered, "I'm a writer. That's my type and nationality."

He asserted, "Well, it's clear that you are technically a Balkan."

"Yes, I'm a Balkan," I sighed with resignation.

He had slapped a label on me that felt for a moment like a healing balm. But only for a moment. Because my British colleague could not have know about the joke circulating all through Yugoslavia. About buying a ticket on the Balkan Express. A one-way ticket. Because they don't sell round-trip tickets. There is no return on that train.

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Everyone who is not with us is against us, shout the Serbs. Everyone who is against is a traitor, shout the Croatians. Petar Petrovic is still standing trembling on the boundary. He observes the frightening speed with which his colleagues, writers and intellectuals, change their colors, their flags, the passion with which they practice oral and written confession. He watches his colleagues present themselves as replicas of Vaclav Havel, Croatian, Serbian, or Slovenian, publishing their collected works. Yesterday's writers are today's ministers of information, yesterday's editors today's chiefs of police. He watches a former apologist for fascism become a respected citizen to whom the republic's president offers birthday greetings on television. He watches his colleagues propose in parliament that the Serbian people drop napalm bombs on the Croatian people. He sees newspaper photos of his colleagues dressed in military uniform, holding readings on the front lines. He reads the statement of his colleague, the well-known poet Brana Crncevic, declaring, "Serbs do not kill from hatred but from despair. And killing from despair is a matter between the killer and God . . . Serbian crimes are answerable to God, crimes of the others are answerable to the Devil." He watches the results of dismantling the country: Croatian cities and villages torn down, people destroyed and impoverished. He sees the Great Manipulators and their teams, war criminals who will never answer for their crimes because they were "chosen by the people."

Peter Petrovic stands on the boundary and does not know who is right; those who are in the majority or he who is alone. He does not know whether he should burn himself alive or accept the collectivity like a consecrated host; whether to become a Croatian or a Serb, to emigrate abroad, to disappear. . . .

I have told my tale from the point of view of an imagined Petrovic, because he is the one whose country, the Yugo-Atlantis, has disappeared. He is the Yugoslav writer who is disappearing. Multinational Yugoslavia has paid dearly for its post-Communist democracy, if that's what it is. The tragic Balkan spectacle is not over. Croatia and Slovenia have achieved independence and international recognition. Bosnia and Macedonia are waiting in line for recognition. The federal army and the Serbian leaders continue to push their rapacious claims, under cover of the outworn idea of unified Yugoslavia.

The great majority of intellectuals, among them our fellow writers, have taken a stand at the side of their rulers, presidents and governments, and official politics. Under the slogan of democratization, the governments of all the republics have made their lands unmistakably poorer and their people unhappier. Instead of genuine democracy, they have created small, militant totalitarian groupings. Instead of citizens,

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they have obedient national statistics. Instead of overthrowing the old state apparatus, they have strengthened small state replicas. Instead of demilitarization, they have a new militarization. The new national states and their rulers demand a new national culture, which will represent the national identity; a new art to function as "spiritual renewal." This is what they will get. They are getting it already, for our colleagues are working for it zealously.

The identity of the writer and the intellectual is up for grabs. To speak of identities at this moment, when so many are losing their lives, the roofs over their heads, those dear to them, may seem too much of a luxury. But it may be the only question to ask. Everything began with it, and like the noose of fate, everything ends with it as well. During the bombardment of Dubrovnik, the poet Milan Milisic lost his life, sitting at his desk in his apartment. Dubrovnik, a Croatian and Yugoslav city, was bombarded by the federal army claiming to be defending the threatened Serbs. Milisic was a Serb by nationality. His death is one more of the jokes that the Yugoslav tragedy of shattered identities plays every day.

Yugoslavia never exported the large number of humanistically oriented intellectuals that the other socialist countries did. It was better known for its export of laborers, of *Gastarbeiter*. At this moment, many intellectuals have gone to Paris, London, New York – those, of course, who had the chance, who chose; those to whom it happened; those who are frightened, confused, sickened at events. So it is not impossible that soon my imaginary conversation with Petar Petrovic might resume like this:

"Hello, Petrovic! I'm calling from – well, that's not important. I just wanted to let you know . . ."

"Know what?"

"I'm changing my name. To Kefka, if that's all right with you."

"I've changed mine, too."

"To what?"

"Don't worry. To Kufta."

I still think that one can choose many things, but still one cannot chose one's birth or one's colleagues. Therefore my story here is a call for us to face up to the history of our so-often compromised craft, to our "race" that frequently, as Osip Mandelstam wrote, "emits a repugnant odor." It is a call to ourselves, "parrots and priests," to face the fact that some of us hammer out words like knives, and some knives like words. That many of us are back in the old trap of masters and servants, executioners and victims. Is there anything at all that we can do in this tired, indifferent, postmodern time, a time which can scarcely tell the difference between genuine and celluloid death? Can we do anything to make that train, the unfortunate Balkan Express, issue us return tickets?

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Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. Hans Magnus Enzensberger will be our last speaker.

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: My remarks are going to sound like a footnote to what Dubravka has said. They are about the production of hatred. In the climate of an academic culture where it is considered politically correct to be politically correct, to speak about the production of hatred may seem redundant. Great efforts are obviously being made in American universities to do away with all manner of discrimination. I am not sure whether deep social problems can be resolved by means of new curricula or by revisions of protocol and semantic etiquette. But then it is certainly not for the outsider to pass judgment on a matter so exquisitely American in its character.

The reflections I should like to offer come from a very different background. Whenever intellectuals are discussing intellectuals, which is one of their favorite occupations, a certain bias is inevitable. It is not that a serious debate of this kind is a mere exercise in self-congratulation; on the contrary, self-irony and self-doubt are very much in evidence, and there are cases when the mood borders on the masochistic. All the same, there is always an air of exclusivity about gatherings like the present one. A minimum of respectability is necessary in order to be invited. This is even clearer in the rare instances when there is something to be celebrated. Eastern Europe has furnished us with many admirable examples of courageous intellectuals, and some of the participants at our conference have come close to being the heroes of the past decade, though such an outcome was, of course, not what they were after. More clearly than on many other occasions I can remember, the bad guys are not amongst us, and they are not likely to be talked about very much.

I am not sure that this is all to the good. In other walks of life, like engineering or insurance, there is a mode of analysis called the worst-case scenario. If we want to consider the risks of our trade, it might be worthwhile to try our hands at something of the sort. This is why I should like to take a brief look at an interesting figure: the intellectual as a hate-monger. Of course, I cannot hope to do justice to such a rich subject. A vast anthology could be put together to prove that point, a sort of album of mug shots of the intelligentsia, and perhaps one day some intrepid editor will do it.

It is true that such an anthology would hardly make good reading. Many of the faces which would appear in the collection would not qualify if we were looking for outstanding achievement. But let us remember that whatever definition of the intellectual we might bring to

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bear, we are dealing with a social as well as a spiritual category. Statistically speaking, it will not do to consider only the first-rate. Quite apart *from this somewhat crude reminder, I hope to show that excellence is* no safeguard against the affliction I have in mind, and that there are many cases of quite eminent thinkers and writers who were, at the same time, very proficient at stirring up hate.

Let me begin with a quotation from one of the most sublime writers in the German language. In 1809, Heinrich von Kleist wrote a poem which had the good fortune to be reprinted in countless textbooks and anthologies throughout the nineteenth century. It is an ode called "Germania Speaking to Her Children," dedicated to the Prussian war against the invading armies of Napoleon. Here is an excerpt in an *ad hoc* English translation:

> Their skull and bone
> shall whiten every mead and field.
> Feed to the fish their corpses
> spurned by bird and beast alike,
> until the River Rhine be stemmed
> by their remains
> and carve out for itself another bed
> to mark our border to the West
> . . .
> A joyous hunt as if to shoot a wolf,
> to kill! On Judgment Day no God
> will ever ask you for your pros and cons.

It is easy to underestimate the effectiveness of such lines. To us, they appear overblown and almost mindless in their venom. They lost their grip long ago. But this is not to say that they never had much authority. On the contrary, they were revered by a substantial audience. I am not saying that a single poem, by itself, could be held responsible for the long-lasting German animosity against the French, let alone for the ensuing three wars. But Kleist's poem is just a sample from an enormous output of similarly inspired work by authors as distinguished as Fichte, Arndt, Brentano, and a host of other, forgotten poets and philosophers. We are dealing with a long tradition which can easily be traced through several generations right up to 1945. A similar case-study could be made with regard to anti-Semitic texts, often produced by the same authors.

Lest it be thought that this is a specific German delicacy, let me add that somewhat later in the day equally rabid voices made themselves heard in France. In many ways, the Action Française provided an exact counterpart to the German chauvinists, each side goading on the other

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into a spiral typical of the hate industry. When the Austrian Emperor issued a Manifesto to declare war in 1914, he depended for its drafting on the services of a celebrated Symbolist poet by name of Hugo von Hofmannsthal.

I tend to think, though I cannot be sure, that the intellectual as a hate-monger is an invention of European origin which is well on the way to becoming a universal phenomenon. In any case, nationalism in our part of the world is unthinkable without the literary contribution of some of the best and the worst minds of the past two hundred years. To draw the line between the two is not an easy task.

Nation-building, as we have learned at our peril, is a precarious undertaking. One of the problems is that it does not proceed in an orderly fashion. As a rule, it is the latecomers who voice their claim in the most strident manner, and to furnish the requisite emotional energy, they depend most heavily on their writers and intellectuals. My own country, coming of age as a modern nation rather late in the day, is a good example. We can study this process *in vitro*, as it were, if we turn to the present situation in Eastern Europe. The antecedents reach back far into the nineteenth century. From the Latvians to the Poles, from the Ukrainians to the Serbs, no ethnic group has been without the shrill voice of the National Poet exalting the mysterious spirit of his own tribe and denouncing the inferior crowd next door in a constant flood of verse epics. Many of these intellectual leaders are hardly known to the outside world, but each of them is devoutly worshipped at home. You will find their statues, strewn with fresh flowers, all over the place, from Sophia to Tallinn and from Bratislava to Kiev. Whatever their noble sentiments or their literary merits, their cult owes much to the capacity they showed for voicing their community's latent feelings of frustration and hatred. Just like Kleist's verses, much of what they wrote may fill us with dismay or even disgust. But it would be rash to pass moral judgment on their output without taking into account the deep ambiguity of their case. Impersonal hate is an incredibly powerful feeling. Not being a good Christian myself, I for one cannot claim to be free of it. There were times in my own country when I was almost overwhelmed by the revulsion I felt at the Master Race and its protagonists.

I shall not even try to disentangle the moral aspects of the problem. What I find more interesting is the question of why intellectuals and especially writers have been so successful in the hate business. There is, of course, a venerable explanation dating back to Greek philosophy. According to Aristotle, the poet is someone who specializes in emotion. This idea is utterly unfashionable with today's theoreticians of literature, though it seems to me that many practitioners of the art hold on to it.

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In any case, past generations have taken it for granted, which ought to be reason enough to take it seriously. The implications have been far-reaching indeed. Those in power have shown respect for and fear of poets until very recently, and they spared no efforts to either corrupt or destroy them, because they believed in their unique power to give voice to the feelings of a collective – or even to invent them.

Given such a situation, there is another question to be asked. Why should the voice of the secular prophet be so strident, the emotions he hawks be so extreme as to verge on the hysterical? The explanation I have to offer is, I am afraid, rather trivial. Any specialist worth his salt will wish to outdo his rivals. This is true of tennis champions, architects and mathematicians. Why should intellectual spokesmen be immune to this temptation? In a sense, a penchant for transgression is intrinsic to their work. Modern sensibility being what it is, an intellectual who refuses to go beyond the limits of ordinary, commonplace experience cannot hope for attention. In the end, to incite is simply more exciting than to pacify. Perhaps no one is more prone to verbal excess than the Poet with a capital *P* and the Thinker with a capital *T*. In their line of work, moderation, compromise and common sense do not happen to be very attractive options. I am not suggesting that they followed from the very start a deliberate strategy of violence; certainly any sort of calculation was far from Kleist's mind. Indeed, it is often the very sincerity of feeling which strikes and baffles posterity. Only much later in the day, when the hate industry became institutionalized, did self-promotion and opportunism take over.

Most of us grew up in an ideologically well-ordered world where killing people for national or racial reasons was seen as a right-wing habit, whereas the left was eager to kill for the sake of class. In actual fact, things were not quite as simple as that. The historical roots of both nationalist frenzy and class hatred are to be found in the French Revolution, and it is well-known to what extent the intellectuals rose to that occasion. Some time ago, a few Frenchmen took a look at the most famous poem produced for the greater glory of the revolution. They found out to their consternation that the *Marseillaise*, a work of Rouget de Lisle, was a rather blood-curdling affair. A brief but heated debate followed this discovery. Was a song giving license to kill an appropriate national anthem? Should the text be edited or retouched to avoid further embarrassment? In the end, the discussion came to nothing, perhaps because almost no one in France or elsewhere remembers more than the first line of their respective national anthem.

It is an open question as to where the bards and prophets of hatred found a more rewarding field of action: to the left or to the right of the political spectrum. Soviet Communism certainly held an enormous

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attraction for intellectuals both in the East and the West, hardly to be accounted for by the charms of Marxist theory. It was rather a sense of drama, a rush of strong emotions that captivated so many minds. The really good hate-mongers operated at this visceral level. Here is a sample from 1920 by Mayakovsky:

> Bold and athletic, each muscle tough,
> activity your religion,
> your soul:
> steam, pneumatic drill, electricity! ! !
> . . .
> Let the hatchet dance on the bald heads
> of self-seekers and charity dealers!
> Kill! Kill! Kill! Well done:
> their skull-caps make perfect ashtrays.

In a text like Mayakovsky's *150 Million*, what we hear is no longer the voice of an individual, but of an all-powerful collective juggernaut. The Poet adopts the role of a ringleader. Clearly, a fantasy of omnipotence is involved. From being an outsider, a marginal figure, the Poet has graduated, almost overnight, to a position of power. At least in his own opinion, it is up to him to decide who shall live and who shall die. This is pretty heady stuff. There is, however, another side to this sudden change of fortune. The most vociferous purveyors of hatred have usually been, at the same time, great experts in adulation. Four years after *150 Million*, Mayakovsky published another epic devoted exclusively to the cult of Lenin. It seems as if in this type of commitment aggressiveness went hand in hand with servility.

The list of authors who produced odes to Lenin and hymns to Stalin is impressive, and even if other intellectuals could not compete in lyrical terms, they did their best to emulate them in prose. The impact these efforts had on their audiences is open to doubt. By and large, I think the message of hate has proved more effective than the invitation to worship. Whereas the cult of personality always had a hollow ring about it, resentment, envy, and vengefulness were often sincerely felt.

We all know that extreme polarization breeds strange similarities. The saga of the militant left and the militant right, a tale of two centuries, is full of mutual imitations and mirror images. It is perhaps the greatest triumph of East European dissidence that it has broken with this tradition. Instead of responding in kind to the enemy's outpouring of vindictiveness, most of the dissidents adopted an unheard-of civilized tone

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of voice. It is true that there are quite a few exceptions to this rule. Intellectuals like Rasputin and Bondarev in Russia, Czurka in Hungary, Ziedonis in Latvia, Gamsachurdia in Georgia have contracted a strong dose of their arch-enemies' paranoia, and some of their pronouncements qualify for a place of honor in our imaginary anthology of intellectual hate-mongering.

From a Western, metropolitan point of view, the lines of Kleist, of Mayakovsky, and of all their followers may seem infantile, outlandish, or even quaint. Above all, they appear definitely dated. The idea that a poet or a thinker could express the deeper feelings of millions and mobilize relevant parts of the population is, in our social context, simply preposterous. It is true that a few veterans aspiring to this kind of role are still around. But the rest of us know that other, more specialized professionals have taken over the job. People in the United States or in England would not dream of looking for poets or philosophers to voice their rage, frustration, and resentment. The task of propaganda has been entrusted to talkmasters, gurus, editors, anchormen, preachers and public-relations consultants. This is, as we all know, a mixed blessing. It also means that literature in particular and perhaps the humanities in general are not any longer burdened with the debilitating task of representing a given nation, class, or creed and providing it with the emotional fuel needed for the next conflagration. In this respect, at least, the much-lamented loss of authority of the written word fills me with relief.

But let us remember that all this is true only of our part of the world. Elsewhere, there is scope enough left for the intellectual dealing in hatred. The need for him is felt wherever a tribe or creed feels defeated, wounded, humiliated, and unable to voice its complaints. Such embittered collectives provide an ideal sounding-board for the respective bard or prophet waiting in the wings. From the Balkans to the Caucasus, from the Maghreb to the Cape, from the Middle East to the Indian subcontinent, the outlook for this particular type of intellectual has never been brighter, and it would be rash indeed to believe that the world is safe from him.

Edith Kurzweil: Once again, the applause for our speakers is overwhelming, and for good reason. As before, I would like to give the participants a chance to talk about each other's papers; after that we will open the discussion to the audience. I would also like to invite the participants from other sessions to come up and to comment. We haven't done that so far, and I think it might be quite interesting. Who would like to begin?

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Richard Pipes: I would like to mention that ninety years ago, a remarkable French writer, Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, wrote a book called *The Philosophy of Hatred*, of which I have been able to find only one copy in the United States, in the Library of Congress. It called attention to the similarities between right-wing anti-Semitism and left-wing class warfare and predicted more or less that these two movements would merge. It was a striking premonition of the effect of ideologies driven by hatred.

Sidney Monas: I would like to ask Professor Pipes what he makes of the remarkable recent elevation of Sakharov, who is now the object of a religious cult, which is divorced from anything Sakharov apparently stood for. In that same vein, I would like to ask Mr. Enzensberger if he perceives any contemporary national groups that have suffered war, disgrace, and so on, and as a result have responded with the production of the kind of rage that is now subject to the intellectual hatred he refers to.

Richard Pipes: This unwholesome cult of Sakharov is above all traceable to the fact that Russians are in a very self-deprecating mood. They feel they have been a total historic failure. They look back on the last seventy years, and not only do they see the tragedies of which we are all aware, but as more and more evidence that was suppressed under the regime comes to light, it begins to dawn on them that almost every Russian is tainted in some way. It has recently been revealed that even Mandelstam wrote a paean in praise of Stalin. Hence, the Russians are seeking people they can look up to. Without question, Sakharov is such a person. There is nothing to his detriment, as far as I know, absolutely no sordid episode in his entire life. The Russians are worshipping, as it were, pure spirit, pure decency, and pure goodness. Although they could certainly find many worse choices of individuals to worship, and I know that Sakharov would very much resent it if he were alive, it is understandable in view of the gloom that pervades the country. The prominent Russian sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskiaya has said her country has suffered a collective nervous breakdown. What do the Russians look back at? Apart from literature, there really is nothing they can look up to with pride. Sakharov, of the whole Soviet experience, comes out as the purest symbol of decency with which to identity.

Adam Michnik: I have one question. On what grounds would you say that Bondarev was a dissident? According to that way of thinking, if he was a dissident, then I am the Dalai Lama.

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Hans Magnus Enzensberger: Of course, we can discuss at length who should qualify as being a dissident. But it seems that this group of writers, including Rasputin and Bondarev, got into trouble with the authorities because of their fixation on ecological questions. That was perhaps the only point where they really questioned the system, because in their terms the holy Russian earth was being contaminated by radioactivity and the chemical industry. In this respect, they put up a certain type of fight.

I would like to address Sidney Monas's question, whether one could think of other groups today who have been equally humiliated. I could think of many such groups who did not respond exactly in the same way, but I think that is because a necessary condition for this hate industry, which I tried to describe, is the connection with nationalism. Take, for example, the Gypsies who were a very humiliated and persecuted group of people, or the red Indians for that matter, or even the Jewish diaspora. None of them created an industry of textbooks filled with hatred against some other group. They didn't do that because they were not in the process of nation-building. Now, to the extent that Israel has become a nation, you also hear emanating from the Jews there shrill voices – much more so than ever before in Jewish history, from what I can gather.

Question: Yesterday, Mr. Brodsky made a statement with which I think most of us could sympathize. He said a writer owes absolutely nothing to society. That makes sense to us, because most of us are departing from the position of socialist realism, having known the horrors and mediocrity that it can inflict on us. My question is to Mr. Enzensberger. Right now we see a different perspective. We have the hate industry on the one hand – where intellectuals can actually become very dangerous in propagating hatred – and I would add that on the other hand we have the kind of hatred that can come through in the wake of an intellectual's work, without directly inciting people to hatred. Hate can flow in the work of an intellectual, as in the case of Salman Rushdie's works, which are suffused with all kinds of hatred.

Does an intellectual owe something to the society? Should intellectuals be responsible in the sense of staying away from hatred – at least not to propagate hatred? Or should we take the position that the intellectual is absolutely free and owes nothing to the society? In other words, what is the responsibility of the intellectual?

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: I tried to be careful in pointing out that I was not raising the moral question of hatred, because to argue against hate as such – that hate is bad for you, therefore don't hate – is a

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matter for clergymen, not for myself. I leave it to a priest to preach in this way. I personally believe that in human nature, hate exists – hate is generated every day. But what I had in mind in my remarks was a special type of hate; that is why I call it an industry connected to nation-building. Perhaps you can't *learn* from the experience of others, but at least you ought to *take notice* of the experience of others. This game, as I said, has been going on for nearly two hundred years now, so there is an accumulated experience. In fact, if you study these hate texts, they are very similar to each other. They have the same rhetoric. They say almost the same thing. So to point out the record of their manifestation is the first step for us in achieving a minimum of immunity.

Of course, if you point out to a Serbian an example of this kind of hatred generated by a Serbian, or point out a German example to a German, or a French example to a Frenchman, few of them will readily admit that it is nothing but chauvinistic claptrap. But if you begin by demonstrating that all countries have the potential to succumb to these kinds of hatred, then perhaps the recognition that we are dealing with a universal phenomenon may be of some help.

I myself have had very strong feelings of hatred – political hatred – in my life. I know from experience what it is like. I don't labor under the delusion that you can just do away with it by exhorting people to be good, that was not my point at all. But speaking among the practitioners of a certain type of work, that is, writers and intellectuals, I think the least we can do is to take note of our antecedents and the risks of what we are up to.

Richard Pipes: Chekhov was criticized by someone, I think it was his publisher, for displaying a kind of a moral ambivalence when he described events. He responded with a wonderful answer, based on a story he wrote about horse thieves. He said, "Let courts judge horse thieves. I want to show that people steal horses not because they are poor or needy but because it is a kind of passion with them. I will not involve myself in judging them, that is for others to do."

And to answer the question, whether a writer owes anything to society, I think Chekhov was absolutely right. Tolstoy wrote on the same subject that the only task of the writer is to tell the truth.

Edith Kurzweil: I want to make one comment. While listening, I was wondering what thread goes through all of your contributions. This is what came to mind: when Mr. Zagajewski spoke, he said that we shouldn't forget that so many intellectuals and academics supported the Communist system and that they were working for some of the system's

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organizations. In one of this morning's contributions, we heard about how the French Communists wrote their tomes of self-criticism. In fact they started even earlier, around 1956 after the Twentieth Party Congress. Henri Lefebvre, for example, wrote his two volumes, *La somme et le reste*, as did Edgar Morin. We had this *en masse* self-criticism, after the publication in France of *The Gulag Archipelago*. So it occurred to me that some exercise of this kind might be helpful perhaps to those on the American left – who might also engage in a similar exercise. This might help us to come to terms with some of our past opinions. We could learn also from some of those writers and intellectuals in Central and Eastern Europe, who have to confront the collapse of their states. I wonder whether this might not help us to do away with some of our hatreds.

Question: Mr. Enzensberger spoke about explicit hatred by the masses of people. My question is whether those intellectuals who propagate the notion of a nation possessing special messianisms are implicitly expressing the same hatred, essentially the same thing, only in a much more sophisticated and dangerous way, in some of the new states of Central and Eastern Europe?

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: If you claim a mysterious substance – a metaphysical substance for your own race or ethnic identity – you have to exclude the other, and whether you make this explicit or not, eventually it *will become* explicit in your actions. A conflict is bound to follow, most likely about "blood" or "soil." And your final aim will be to eliminate the other.

Vladimir Tismaneanu: Mr. Pipes, how do you see the future of Russian democracy in the light of what has happened lately, especially considering the attention being paid to Sakharov's philosophy there? Is there is a very likely prospect for the emergence of democratic traditions or institutions in Russia? Or will the archaic traditions prevail over the adoption of Western ones?

My second comment is about Dubravka's impressive presentation on what used to be called Yugoslavia. I think that everyone here would agree with me that it was deeply moving. I want to understand what is going on there, and I don't have any presumption or pre-hypothesis or anything like that. But I think in so many conferences and discussions, and I have heard it quite frequently, that Yugoslavia and its political philosophy is very much associated after 1939 with Communism. So basically, I don't say it is bad, and I don't say it is good. I simply say that

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the collapse of Communism in Yugoslavia had to mean the collapse of Yugoslavia itself. I would like to know your assessment of this theory.

My third question is actually a comment. Participating today I have been reminded of an image that haunted me since I saw the recent film by Istvan Szabo, *Meeting Venus*. There is a moment in the film when Glenn Close and a Dutch fellow, who plays a Hungarian conductor in this post-modern reenactment of a Tanhäuser production in an imaginary opera house in Paris, get together in an apartment with some other people. There is a former East German truck driver, who in the movie, after the unification, has become a star in the opera in Cologne, playing Wagnerian, heroic male roles. Then there is a Russian Jewish immigrant, a Polish intellectual, and all kinds of other people. There is a moment of complete hysteria, and they start voicing all the ethnic stereotypes, calling each other all kinds of names. Then just as suddenly, all these Eastern and Central Europeans begin to sing from memory, *Suliko*, forgetting their hatred. I was watching this film with my American wife, and my first reaction was to tell her before the next line came in the movie, "Oh, Mary, you know that this was Stalin's favorite song," and then, sure enough, the next line in the movie explained to the American, "This was Stalin's favorite song."

Richard Pipes: The question to me concerned the future of democracy in Russia. I am not very sanguine. The fact is that most people do not realize because of the impressive facade of Russian statehood, that in its entire history of seven hundred years Russia really *never* built a normal society in a normal state. It was always something constructed from above, contrived mechanically not organically, run by the bureaucracy, army, and police. Now when in 1917 and then again today, the government, which holds it all together, snaps, and the bureaucracy goes, and the army no longer has the force, the whole thing falls into total anarchy. Presently there are two possibilities: either there will be another dictatorship, which has been the pattern in the past, or, what I hope will happen this time, there will be a slow process of disintegration of absolutely everything. Perhaps for the first time in seven hundred years in Russia they will build up a society from below and a state will emerge out of this society. If that happens, you will have a peculiar, special Russian kind of democracy.

But if that process does not occur, then we will have what we have in your native country, Romania, a kind of dictatorship with the same old cadres, only under a national flag instead of the Communist flag. Democracy is a very difficult system, and very few countries have it. It has

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to be developed very slowly and gradually. It will take, in my opinion, one or two or possibly three generations to take hold in Russia, if at all.

Dubravka Ugresic: To answer Vladimir's question to me about what is going on in Yugoslavia, I will give you a true anecdote: A person from what was Yugoslavia telephoned his friend, an Englishman, in Britain and asked him, "Can you please tell me what is going on in my country?" It is very difficult for all of us to understand what is going on, or, I should say, why it is going on.

About the theory that with the fall of Communism necessarily has come the demise of Yugoslavia, I would say that the idea of "Yugoslavism" is much older than that of Communism, but Yugoslavia as the state we used to know and live in did begin with and collapse with Communism. It collapsed due to aggression, intolerance, national repressions, political amateurism, and many other reasons. But it did not collapse because the idea of "Yugoslavism" was unnatural, as political thinkers today would like to persuade us. I am not a politician and thus cannot fully answer such questions, which may have simple answers. I do know, however, that the answers from the point of view of people's lives are very serious and tragic. In short, one cannot be a Yugoslav any more because such an entity no longer exists. Besides, the whole idea of "Yugoslavism" has been terribly compromised by the Serbian government and the Yugoslav army. They are brutally killing the people of ex-Yugoslavia, in the name of an appropiated and distorted idea of "Yugoslavism." The problem is that under the genuine, original idea of "Yugoslavism" whole generations have been born and raised for almost fifty years. It is very difficult to be forced to turn off one's life experience, one's cultural past, whether or not it happened to be good or bad.

Question: I would like to ask Mr. Pipes about two things. First, what would you say to those thinkers who have insisted that the Soviet Union under the Communist regime was not a totalitarian society? Secondly, in comparison to the attitude toward Sakharov in the Soviet Union, how do the people there feel about Solzenhitsyn?

Richard Pipes: I'm not going to criticize my colleagues since they aren't here to defend themselves. I think that the so-called "hard-line" totalitarian school has been vindicated, and one of the best proofs of it is that the concept of totalitarianism is now widely adopted in what used to be the Soviet Union. Russians use it all the time, even though our academics have seen fit to abandon it. I think the term explains very well what in fact happened.

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And incidentally, if I may just add a footnote to what has been said today, the first to have drawn the distinction between authoritanian and totalitarian regimes was not Jeane Kirkpatrick. The distinction antedates her – and she would be in agreement with me on this point – by at least thirty years. In 1932, the German scholar H. O. Ziegler distinguished the two systems in the very title of his book: *Autoritärer Oder Totaler Staat?* Your second question about Solzenhitsyn versus Sakharov: I think Solzenhitsyn is admired as an heroic figure, but I don't believe he is widely read, and he is rather out of touch. The fact is that he is not returning to his native country even after the leaders have met all his conditions, namely that they publish all his works, including *Gulag Archipelago.* When they did publish them, one after the other, he was asked why he was not going back; his wife said he would return when the leaders of Russia were "wiser." Now that is a condition they might never meet to his satisfaction, since he considers himself uniquely wise. But the fact that Sakharov not only stayed there but made sure that every time he traveled abroad he would be able to get back, makes him part of that society in a way that Solzenhitsyn is no longer. His latest books, from a literary point of view, strike me as quite unreadable. They are too long, too verbose, too uncritical; I don't think they have an audience in Russia.

Question: It is my understanding that a great part of the reason why writers and intellectuals were able to play such an important role in the destruction of the old system and the attempt to build new systems was perhaps, paradoxically, related to their own social situation in the old regime. I refer to the system of official linkages between intellectuals and the state: for example, the Unions of Writers, Academy of Sciences, and so on. With the destruction of this old system and with in many cases the destruction of many of the offical linkages, my question is the following, especially for Professor Pipes. Do you believe that in such cases the possibilities – the opportunities for scholars, intellectuals, their input and participation in political debate – will be very much changed? What kind of new opportunities and new challenges are created by these changes?

Richard Pipes: Until the Soviet regime began the system of patronage, intellectuals in Russia were basically on their own. Nobody was paying them; many of them lived in penury, and they acted very courageously against the regime. It seems to me that this should be repeated now. Deprived of state patronage, deprived of such cozy institutions as the Academy of Sciences and the Union of Writers, the hacks will abandon literature and the true writers will remain.

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In our own country, there was better scholarship in the 1930s than in the 1980s and 1990s, because it took the courage to face poverty to become a scholar. As a result, only serious and committed people got into it. For the past twenty or thirty years, given the enormous amount of money poured into universities by the government and the foundations, a lot of people have gotten into scholarship who have neither the talent nor the inclination for it. So I would say that, yes, undoubtedly a lot of people will fall by the wayside, but the really worthy ones will continue, because from what I know of the dissidents, they are not driven by the desire for money or fame. Some kind of fire burns inside of them that forces them to do what they are doing.

Edith Kurzweil: I know the feeling. That is what I tell people when they ask me, "Why do you edit a literary magazine? It's such a losing proposition." And I answer, "The more we publish, the more money we lose, but the more influence we are having."

Question: I have two questions, one for Mr. Enzensberger and one for Professor Pipes. Mr. Enzensberger, you are bringing up the notion of Israeli nationalism and the nation-building of Israel involving the production of hatred. I don't think it's really the case. Granted there is a lot of hatred that may be generated from certain people, but I think there is a qualitative difference between the kinds of hatred that are felt by people who actually are under siege or under attack and people who produce hatred in order to develop a sense of a national community. I think that this is an important distinction, and I think it is one that can be made between nation-building in Israel and nation-building in Germany, but I would like to get beyond that point.

That is, in the background of much of this discussion, there has been the issue of anti-Semitism as it's emerged after the deep freeze of the Communist era. Clearly the fall of Communism is a positive fact: it has opened up the possibily for a decent life for millions of people, but has there not also been as a result the revival of or the loosing on the world of these atavistic forces that predate the Communist era in this part of the world?

Professor Pipes, not to attack the greatness of Sakharov in any way, but it seems to me that a man of that degree of intellect and knowledge and accomplishment, who took until rather late in his career to apparently even understand that there was something wrong with the Soviet system, does not appear to me as great a figure as someone who perhaps for idealistic reasons supported the Communist program at an earlier point, then recognized his error, and became an opponent of the regime. There may be a purity about Sakharov, but there is also about him a

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naiveté that I don't think should be a model for intellectuals. Would you comment on that?

Hans Magnus Enzensberger: To the first question, of course, the answer is yes. We have heard quite a lot about the freeze hypothesis, but let us not forget that the regimes themselves were rather good in engendering waves and waves of collected hatred. The anti-Zionist campaigns in Poland, for example, in 1968 and 1969, drove out almost all the remaining Jewish population which had survived the Holocaust. As for the anti-Semitic overtones of latter-day Stalinism – I remind you of the Doctor's Plot shortly before Stalin's death. Hate campaigns of this sort were started whenever it suited the political regime. When it didn't suit them, hate campaigns were forbidden. It was part of the politics of Communism to solve conflicts by forbidding them. The moment the lid was off, all these conflicts came to the surface.

Nasty as all these conflicts are, especially for the people concerned, there is no other way to deal with them except to put them on the table. The political beast is like that. We have to face a period where these things will have to be dealt with, and in the case of Yugoslavia, this is happening before our eyes in the most bloody way. Let us hope that in other cases, they may be dealt with step by step, through a process of compromise and negotiation. There is a whole menu of possibilities of how to do so without going as far as civil war. One should perhaps encourage the systematic study of minority problems which have been solved in other ways. The Swedes in Finland, the Danish minority in Germany, the German minority in Denmark, and the case of the Southern Tyrols in Italy provide interesting models. Countries which now have problems with minorities ought to take notice.

Richard Pipes: You are applying a very severe test to Sakharov. You have to consider that we are talking about an outstandingly creative theoretical physicist in his twenties and early thirties. If you are familiar with such individuals in this country, you know that they live in a world of their own, totally detached from anything mundane, including politics. It isn't that Sakharov supported Stalinism, which would leave a black mark on his record; he was just oblivious to it. Then, which is to his honor, once he began to discover what the system really was like, he took the courageous line that cost him a great deal and inspired others.

Tatyana Tolstaya: I wanted to comment on the question asked about whether Sakharov was not as great as he would have been if he had at one time been completely idealistic as a Communist and then

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repudiated Communism. I think it is the same as saying – although all metaphors are bad – that Christ was less great than the two wrongdoers who were hanging on the cross on both sides of him, because they had been stealing for ideological reasons for some time and then at the last moment they realized they were wrong, while Christ himself knew that all the time.

My question is to Professor Pipes. I'm interested to know about whether any kind of dissidence is now possible in Russia: I suddenly realized that I don't know what it means to be a dissident in Russia right now. There is a sort of acceptable position and one that is not acceptable, but to speak of dissent is a pretty tricky thing right now, because you do not know what you are going to oppose. The regime and the leaders all oppose each other. The Vice President is in a constant war with the President. The Prime Ministers change every two weeks, and then they somehow distribute power among themselves. They all come out with different economical programs which may be brilliant, all of them, but they contradict each other. So what will dissent look like in these circumstances?

Richard Pipes: I do not believe that the word *dissenter* today makes any sense. In fact, it makes more sense for an American intellectual than for a Russian one, because of the political correctness issue here. There are things that cannot be said in this country: I mean you can say them, nobody is going to arrest you or put you in a labor camp, but you will be ostracized by your peers. In Russia such pressures do not exist today. Therefore the word *dissent* doesn't mean anything there. Traditionally, one became a member of the intelligentsia not by virtue of education, but by the virtue of opposition. In tsarist as well as Soviet Russia, to be a member of the intelligentsia you had to be *against*; if you were not against the political and social order, you were not of the intellegensia. You might have been a very well-educated person, but if you joined the government you were disqualified from the intelligentsia. Today the intelligentsia in Russia is not against anything – what could it be against? Today you now have to be *for* something. This change was caused by a major crisis of identity on the part of Russian intellectuals, since traditionally they have identified themselves by opposition. Now they have to identify themselves by affirmative action of some kind, and they are at a loss. They are at sea, in a situation they have never been in before, except during 1917 for about eight months. They will have to rethink their role, and this is not an enviable task.

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Question: I was in Yugoslavia in the sixties and the seventies. I took a boat down the Dalmatian coast and stopped at all the main cities. When Khrushchev was in Dubrovnik Harbor and the people went to see him and his wife, there didn't seem to be any hostility. Was it Tito's charisma that unified the country? *Yugo*, as far as I understand, means "unity of Slavic nations." What power did Tito have? Was it all military? He was not coddling Khrushchev; he was the most dissident of the Communist nations' leaders, as far as I remember. What was it that this man had that kept the people together – and that the minute he died, they all split?

Dubravka Ugresic: Your question is a complex one, and it seems as if it would take more time than we have here today to explore it.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you all once again. We hope you'll join us for the reception on this floor of the Library and on the floor above.

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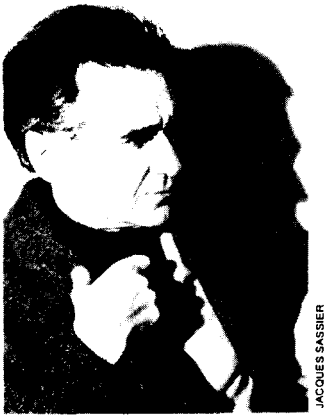

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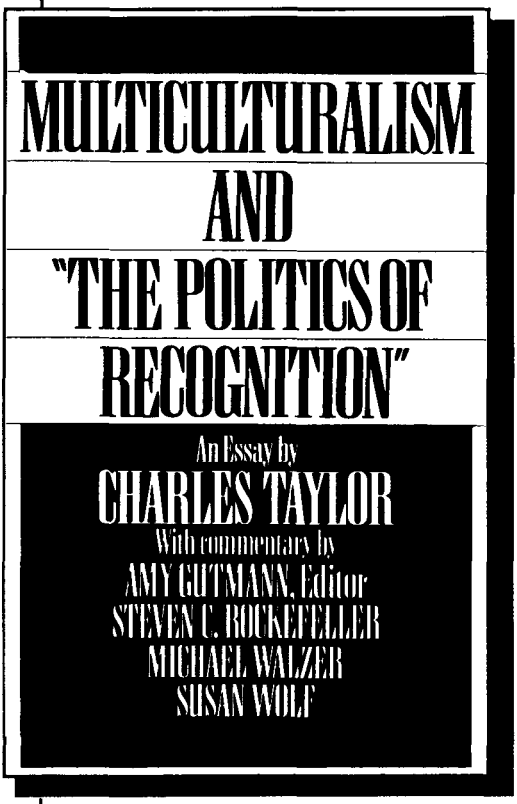

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Intellectuals' Notes from the Underground

William Phillips: This is the next to the last lap of our intellectual marathon, and we are going to have a good program this morning. The subject is a little more internal than some of our previous topics. The title is taken, as you all know, from "Notes from the Underground," but Dostoevsky is going to be somewhat more politicized than usual. The first speaker is Czeslaw Milosz.

Czeslaw Milosz: I have no paper, so I'm going to improvise. First, I would say that a writer is a very vulnerable creature, to whom at least one or two readers are essential. It's very difficult to write without readers. And so, dissidence is largely a problem of a community of dissidents. The difference between dissidence and resistance is very difficult to establish. Let me use an example. After martial law was introduced in Poland, Adam Michnik was a dissident and he spent several years in prison, but there was a community of individuals who were against the government. Adam Michnik was aware of that and could feel that he wasn't alone, that there were others who thought alike. This is a tremendous force that gives great hope. In my earlier remarks, I spoke about dissidents in the West. Of course, the phenomenon can be described briefly by what happened to Albert Camus, who was a dissident. Jean-Paul Sartre, after Camus published *L'homme révolté* (*The Rebel*), wrote: If you don't like Communism and capitalism, I know one place for you, the Galapagos Islands. That was the mood of the epoch. I myself, being a dissident in this respect, was not alone because I had a few people for whom I could write, and having the approval of even one friend is very important. As a poet completely isolated and not translated into other languages, I relied upon the opinion of a few faithful friends. In this way, there arises the phenomenon of a certain community in dissidence. And there are many ambiguities connected with that.

In 1984 during martial law in Poland, I published an article entitled, "Noble-mindedness, Alas." Of course, I approved completely of the dissidents' line of resistance in Poland, but, nevertheless, I felt that a certain public opinion had already been formed and that all the writers were subjected to the pressure of that opinion; they were compelled to

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resist that pressure of public opinion with dissident opinion, which raises the issue of literary values versus moral values and the pressure of community. A similar problem arose during the war. Of course, there was a resistance, there was the literature of resistance, but this did not mean that it was necessarily of high literary quality. The problem at that time was that it was impossible to rebel, to be a dissident of resistance, but at the same time it was obvious that literature created with the best intentions, anti-Nazi literature, was not necessarily good literature.

Today, I think, we are confronted with this problem in a new guise. If we observe, especially in Central Europe and Eastern Europe, the resurgence of patriotic, ethnocentric feelings, we see that it's extremely difficult to resist those pressures. The proponents of nationalism (though in my opinion there are few, and among Polish intellectuals I know practically none) believe in a nationalistic doctrine whereby the state should be owned by one ethnically pure group. Other citizens are, so to say, second-rate citizens. In 1922, the first elected president of the Polish Republic, Gabriel Narutowicz, was killed by a nationalist fanatic who was angry because Narutowicz had been elected by the so-called minorities, at that time numerous in Poland and mostly Jews, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Lithuanians. Unfortunately, the pressures of ethnocentric tendencies are really identical to the pressures of the nationalistic doctrine. Yet because ethnocentric tendencies are hidden in customs and traditional mores, people don't realize that they are imprisoned by what really are tribal prejudices. For instance, I haven't heard the voices of any Serbian intellectuals against what happened in Yugoslavia, and I understand why. There is a certain general mood in Serbia that is largely paranoid. It goes back fifty years to what the Croats did to the Serbs in the past. It's a particular mixture of Communist and nationalistic propaganda, a general mood, and to act against that mood, to be a dissident, is extremely dangerous for an individual, not because the authorities would punish him, but because he would be ostracized by the

This represents a new type of dissidence in our part of Europe, dissidence from a prevailing social mood. People are completely unaware of it. I published several articles in defense of the independence of Lithuania. Then a liberal friend of mine published a piece refuting what I had written. I wrote that I perceived all the ethnocentric, anti-Lithuanian prejudices as having arisen from before the war. My liberal friend was unaware that his train of thought revealed him to be really a servant of prejudice. These are the dilemmas and ambiguities of dissidence. They blur the line between dissidence and resistance. I hope that my friend Adam Michnik will take the floor, so that we can continue this discussion.

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William Phillips: Thank you. The next speaker is Eda Kriseová. She is a fiction writer and a member of President Havel's cabinet. She's written a biography of President Havel.

Eda Kriseová: The title of my remarks is "Of Eggheads and Heads of State," and the subject of my remarks, "Where did I hide my manuscript?" brings to mind this episode.

In late 1988, I finally was granted an exit visa to travel to the United States, after seven years of regular requests. Thanks to the efforts of my American friends, to whom I will always be grateful, I had received repeated invitations to visit George Washington University in Washington DC, on a visiting writers program. During my three-month visit, I was invited to Harvard University, where I gave a public reading of my fiction. Of course, I found the time to visit the library at Harvard. A grand set of computers housed the card catalogue. I approached the computer terminal and, with some nervousness, tapped out "Czech Underground Literature." The computer replied that, yes, it was familiar with the subject. Then, with a bit more apprehension, I tapped out my name. The computer recognized me. And then upon the screen appeared names of my underground manuscripts. They were described as "carbon copy with the signature of the author." No doubt bringing anxiety to all the hard-working students around me, I burst into tears. I felt something like a victorious Robinson Crusoe – my message in the bottle had washed up on a shore somewhere. Unfortunately, I had to return to the desert island – but at least I knew the system worked. So when I am asked to answer the question, "Where did I hide my manuscript?" the best answer I have is: in the computers of the library of Harvard University.

At the moment, it's difficult to work up much passion to recall the "exciting" days of living under a totalitarian government. Running around with suitcases full of forbidden magazines, hiding them in bushes, and all that. I must say that I find it counterproductive to spend time recalling the recent past – the present and the immediate future demand far more attention. For me, the recent past seems like another life, with little connection to the present one. Some day I will be able to focus on that period. But now I'm afraid you would be poorly served by my memory. Instead, I would prefer to speak on the political role of intellectuals and former dissidents in Eastern and Central Europe.

At the risk of sounding presumptuous, I will say that Czechoslovakia is in a period similar perhaps to Greece under Pericles in the fifth century B.C., Florence in the fifteenth century under Lorenzo the Magnificient, or to the early days of the United States when politics was full of writers, philosophers, and other non-politicians. Generally, these eras don't last

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don't last long – they aren't even eras, they are "brief periods." You have the right to ask me how things are going these days. You have the right to know if the great expectations brought about by the entry of intellectuals into the government of Czechoslovakia has proved to be a success. It is my duty and obligation, as someone in a position of responsibility, to tell you: "It is too early to know." Or, as they say on television here, "It remains to be seen."

There is no use debating whether it is good or bad that intellectuals have occupied leading positions in government. It was inevitable. They had no alternative. Those who brought about the revolution had a clear obligation to take charge in its aftermath. They couldn't just walk away. And there was no real alternative; there was no uncorrupted, non-Communist, competent "professional" class in Czechoslovakia ready to step in and manage the state. It was the dissidents and their new colleagues who had to rise to the challenge. We often ask ourselves whether intellectuals – which is not a great word, because it sounds pompous, but you know whom I mean – have deprived themselves of moral authority by entering politics. Again, those of us who did enter politics believe that we had no alternative. Intellectuals have brought new dimensions to political life in this part of the world and, in the process, learned a few things themselves.

The biggest danger we're facing today is not the return of Communism. The danger lies more in populism. People, as a whole, want to hear that they're going to be all right. A politician delivering the usual empty promises that he will make everything better – "Read My Lips, No New Taxes," for example – has a great chance to damage society. Following a government of pathological lies, and in a period where hard realities must be faced, the most important quality for the new leaders in Czechoslovakia is the ability to speak the truth. At the same time, they must give hope for change in the future. The hardest fact for people to accept is that the change has to be made within each person's consciousness – an area that, throughout history, has been beyond the reach of legislation.

I would not claim that intellectuals have an exclusive license on the truth, or are the only group in society capable of understanding the truth. But in a country emerging from Communism, it has been necessary for intellectuals to take positions of responsibility, if only temporarily, for a number of reasons. Perhaps the greatest reason is that they could walk away from the position at any moment, and feel no personal loss. They have other lives to lead. The intellectual-turned-politician is by nature self-critical, and thus unable to campaign in his own favor. His self-criticism, detachment, non-partisan approval – these are his positive

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qualities. Intellectuals shy away from the power of government. They have a permanently critical attitude to power, a lack of confidence in it. For that reason they are not very successful at practical politics. The intellectual wishes to create ideas, but dislikes repeating them and forcing them down people's throats. He finds it painful to go over the same story time and time again.

Yet the former dissident, the politician-for-a-while, brings other qualities, which could be seen as positive. He has the capacity to live without privacy and under continuous threat. He can live with the realization that it is most likely for things to change radically from one moment to the next. Everything can occur at the last possible moment; the same set of circumstances might never reappear. The same opportunity never presents itself. The stakes are always high. The dissident who has become a politician has learned to live as a displaced person and has also learned how to lose. He is accustomed and indeed trained to look for results in a long time-frame. He does not relate his success or failure to the validity of his own beliefs. He is used to the idea that he might not live to see the results of his efforts. He has learned to be patient and knows that the energy he has expended will some day, somewhere manifest itself. And that even if it didn't, it gives his life meaning in every single moment. And unlike a professional politician – someone with specialized training and who from youth has aimed for political power – the dissident has an additional dimension, the existential one. Here I am. I am doing everything in my power, and if you don't like it, I can leave at any time. I have a place to go back to, because I still have my work to finish. I left it only because you asked me to do so.

Politics is not very difficult, but it is exhausting. If an artist goes into politics, he must be able to take into account that he will not be able to touch his art – in fact he will have to forget about it. As a writer he must be naked, and as a politician he must be clothed. The man of action cannot remain aloof from events. The man who, every moment, is creating a new reality, cannot create the more real reality, which is art. It is a pity, but it has its advantages. The politician who is not a professional must above all be a person with certain moral standards. He does what he is able to do; he is not a calculating person and above all he does not include himself and his position in his calculations. In his actions and decisions, he is a free man, independent of any wish to continue as a politician. The capacity for self-dissociation, which the dissident learned in the past, contributes to his feeling of freedom, the elimination of privacy. As Bohumil Hrabal writes in one of his novels, "I live in a glass house, I cover myself with a glass blanket." The loss of freedom gives a man a chance to become free. It frees him in the sense that it brings him to a different level of consciousness. To a dimension where fear doesn't

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exist. It forces him into contact with something which is greater than he is. Call it God, call it conscience. It's not really important what we call it – contact with the soul, if you like. It takes us to our innermost depths, our most precious qualities.

When a person is a dissident, he or she is wiped off the face of the Earth. A writer who is not allowed to publish is a writer who doesn't exist. They take away a superficial part of him, the confirmation of his own success, the affirmation of his own existence. His echo is removed. Thus they place him in the void, turn him into a solitary voice – and do him a great service. They gradually increase his resistance until he loses his fear. To lose his fear the dissident needs only to be aware of the risks he runs, reconcile himself to them, and take account of them. Then he can come to no harm. When a man reconciles himself to his own mortality, then nothing can happen to him at all. At that moment, the hell that until then had appeared so real, changes into a mock hell. Man is finally prepared to free himself of the policeman's clutch and be received into the embrace of transcendence. The dissident is obliged to abandon everyday concerns, he is thrown out of the establishment, he loses all certainties. But he then also loses those pragmatic crossroads and milestones, the guardrails between which life buffets him. This may be another rung on Jacob's ladder to heaven. Thus it is that everything can, and in fact usually does, have a paradoxical effect. When they take the ground from underneath a man, when they throw him out of the little world he knows, he can become a citizen of the universe. They release him from his made-to-measure opinions, the everyday clothes in which he lived and went his way about the world.

Politics, for a writer, is an interesting experience. For that matter, every experience is interesting – it's the main advantage of the profession. The experience of politics is more enriching than it might appear at first sight. A writer is usually self-centered. He writes about things he sees and lives through. And the fact that he signs every word makes him all the more self-centered. (By the way, the Communists supported the writer's self-importance by calling him "an engineer of human souls," a phrase you may know as the title of a Josef Skvorecky novel. Perhaps it was not a bad idea. But the nation, in its moral degeneration, had its conscience delegated to mediocre writers and cowards.) Under any circumstances, it is not surprising when the writer easily succumbs to the delusion of his own importance and irreplaceability. The significance of his writing, even if he suffers only slightly from writer's itch, his sense of belonging among the chosen ones, is enhanced by being banned. Many "underground writers" falsely believed that their voices were of significance, simply because their governments felt obliged to ban their works.

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I realized all of this only when I entered public service. Public service is like sailing on a raft. You save a few things and people, which then acquire value for you. You have to get by with little, but that little becomes crucially important for you. Public service is the best way of losing your inflated writer's ego. Above all, public service means, once again, losing your privacy. Everything you do is done in public. Again the glass house and the glass blanket. In the period you are obliged to live through, not of your own choice, with such a turbulent history, you cannot feel satisfied with what you have achieved on any single day. It is always too little. When you are a writer, you write a couple of pages, and there you have it. In politics, you don't see a trace. Worn out and nothing to show for it. Furthermore, you are in a state of continual uncertainty. The intellectual is assailed by doubts as to whether he made the right decision, whether he carried out his duties properly, or at least as well as he could.

The dissident-as-politician, who finds it impossible to make the moral compromises so common to politics, once again has the ground cut out from under him. He loses his barriers, crossroads and milestones, the certainties of his dissent. Once again he finds himself in unknown territory, offered the citizenship of the universe and at the same time finding the temptations of power. And he doesn't even have his writing anymore, the thing he could hold on to when he was a dissident. He has only duty and responsibility. He writes many texts, but anonymously. He gives his best thoughts and energy, and usually just gets criticized for it. They all know that he doesn't have a shadow. He can't see any results, he doesn't even have those couple of pages any more. He has to deprive people of their illusions, but lose any illusions about himself as well. He learns patience and self-control. On the other hand, he gets rid of almost all of his personal problems, as they seem to be inessential. He gets rid of his privacy and thus liberates himself, to a certain extent, from the unpleasantness of his own person. This capacity for self-dissociation which he has been granted for the purpose of losing his ego frequently gives rise to the feeling that he doesn't really exist. That he is simply the meeting-place of forces, which pass through him in waves, just the executor of an order higher than his own. His perspective acquires a broader scope, no longer his own. This gives him freedom to decide and to act. His actions too become impersonal and objective. He no longer needs to be afraid of bad decisions, because in this extended frame of mind it just isn't possible to make a bad decision.

The writer is an egocentric. He is happily wrapped in his ego, with its echo. The writer who enters politics loses this paradoxically happy privilege – but he can influence reality. He sees this reality in a different way from the practical politician. He has to see it differently, if only be-

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cause he sees the circle from outside. He doesn't have to. He's there only for the time being, or with part of himself, because at the same time he is someone else too. The space in which he lives is much bigger. If he was a dissident writer, he learned something else – discipline in his speech. When he wrote his little books, he knew that he had to stand behind every word, guarantee them with his life. Otherwise it just wasn't worthwhile for the typist to slave over her typewriter at the end of her working day and type out fourteen *samizdat* copies; the words have to be worth the risk of going to jail. The typists had more to lose than the writers, because they were unknown, without a PEN Club or Helsinki Watch to lobby in their favor.

The writing of words in full awareness of the risks – that Biblical rebirth of the word that was in the beginning – all this was good training for politics, where one is obliged to peer into the fog to find out what it hides. The discipline that is necessary in politics is then once again important for the writer who is allowed to return to his literature. He may return with a new and valuable experience of power. Power is not just something you try out in yourself, that you take like a test. Power does something not just to me but to people I previously knew well. Power is something that works contrary to freedom, that reduces it. The search for power restricts us in our ego, reinforces our limitations, circumscribes our space, because it makes us dependent. Power is a hard drug.

In closing, I will say that however it all turns out, I believe it will possible only several years from now to evaluate the attempts by intellectuals to replace non-existing politicians. (Do I sound like a politician?) If things stay as they are, it will be seen as a contribution to history, an experiment which didn't turn out as well as imagined – but which was bravely marked out and fulfilled in some of its aspects. A new situation was drawn up for all our fellow citizens. An extreme situation, often unpleasant. They discovered what they were capable of, and what they would never be capable of – what they had been deprived of and what they let themselves be deprived of. Every moment of our life is in fact proportional to our whole life. The greatness of the moment is directly proportional to the greatness of the life. This is a fact we must all face one day, whatever we do with our lives.

William Phillips: Thank you. The next speaker is Valery Golofast, a Russian sociologist.

Valery Golofast: As a sociologist, it is risky to enter into a dialogue with dissident writers about the complicated and confused post-

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Communist situation. Pluralism and tolerance of political, cultural, or aesthetic dissidence, of sectarianism or hereticism, are not very viable concepts to use in assessing dissidence as a social movement or category. They represent some other social mechanism or phenomenon.

The abrupt and unexpected death of Andrei Sakharov canonized him as a symbol of the highest moral authority, especially in my country, Russia. He became the measure of the moral potential of the entire dissident and legal rights movement. Sakharov, who always stood for freedom, democracy, human rights, disarmament, who tried to establish a new world order, dreamed of a new constitution, a Pax Sovietica. After confronting Mikhail Gorbachev, at the time the man in power, Sakharov demonstrated the political dignity of the entire dissident movement. This movement ended abruptly, unexpectedly for some of us. Although the oppositional, political, and ideological impulse could not be exhausted, it lost its clear direction. What was left was some intellectual drama, some intellectual puzzle, a peculiar flow of publications, and rather few real suggestions for intellectual solutions. For the moment, I am putting aside the existential dimension of dissidence of which Eda has spoken.

It is well known that the dissident movement, from the 1950s on, attracted participants from all levels of society, from the official cultural and political establishment as well as from alienated, marginalized, and sectarian literary types. Particularly after Boris Yeltsin banned the Communist Party, many dissidents became involved in the official government structure. This conversion of dissidents into bureaucrats and politicians was problematic in view of the moral and political dilemmas that confronted each dissident personally. Does it mean that dissidents, in St. Petersburg, in Russia, in Europe, are the victors or that they are the losers in the current political situation? At first glance, it seems that the majority of dissidents are out of the game, out of politics, although some still have spectacular political careers. Yet overall, the mechanisms of social and political change act destructively on intellectuals, on activists who once more are testing their capabilities, their independence.

In this situation, it is not important whether a dissident chooses to escape the totalitarian order by internal or external emigration. It does not matter whether he continues to have social pretensions, whether he attains high international or national prestige, rejects opportunities for recognition or closes himself into his own creative laboratory. It does not matter whether he is more modern, more European, more or less liberal – that is, market-oriented – or whether he defends morals and law, human individuality and minorities, or is premodern, a traditionalist, a fundamentalist, or a nationalist. I do not think it is important whether or not social and political dissidence is associated with aesthetic escape or

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wandering in the tradition of Solzhenitsyn, Tvardovsky, Pasternak, and Brodsky, with the traditions of Russia's Silver Age or with avant-garde, postmodern, or contemporary developments. For the main question has to do with the direction of Western civilization itself. We must ask whether it is possible to find some justification for this constant movement, even after we have broken with totalitarian, authoritarian, or fundamentalist variants of modernization, and whether it is no more than a question of survival of nations, people, states, and cultures.

Many individuals from the leftist, politically orthodox intelligentsia collaborated with the political regime. After the dismantling of Pax Sovietica, those who were integrated into the system by force and ideology will have to be differentiated. As old definitions of the enemy are dismantled, new values will have to emerge. Many intellectuals who based their interpretations of European culture on economic factors now are unable to do so. In the past, the relative self-sufficiency of national cultures provided a clear perspective for artists; it justified their movement toward the pinnacle of a national, cultural elite. Now, they no longer receive the attention they once did. Writers no longer can pretend that they represent the people, that they are the inventors of new words, new colors, new folklore – an attitude impossible to sustain in today's world. In the past, cosmopolitanism and internationalism dominated religion, science, philosophy, and technology.

In the former Soviet Union, there was a labor force of thirty-five million people who held degrees granted only by state educational institutions. All those people were more or less servants of the state. These masses of educated people were a direct product of the military competition of the sixties and the seventies. The dissidents, speaking objectively, belong among these masses. We must recognize the particular standing of this educated class. The cosmopolitan or nationalistic dilemma is related to the mechanism by which an international culture is being formed. In my view, there is no clear way to escape this dilemma, in terms of political values or from philosophical viewpoints. I agree with Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, Susan Sontag, and Vassily Aksyonov that we must compare the events in the former Soviet Union to those of other modern revolutions that have occurred. We must recognize the new shape of world society.

I would like to make one last point. I have been looking for some clear-cut explanation of why totalitarian variants of modernization different from those of the West have emerged. None of the modern social science studies have been able to answer this question, or to explain why the Soviet regime came into existence in the first place, or for that matter why there have been fascist movements all over the world.

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One reason, of course, is utopian thinking. But the answer to the question of how utopian thinking is connected to the processes of modernization is not clear at all. Even the brilliant minds that have come together for this conference still rely upon individual existential experience in approaching what has happened, while I as a social scientist am looking for more objective answers. Communism is over, but the much deeper problems of all of Western civilization still need to be addressed.

William Phillips: Thank you. The next speaker is Mircea Mihaies, a Romanian editor and writer.

Mircea Mihaies: I have noticed that the only rule respected at this conference has been to disregard the topics indicated by its organizers. The title of my remarks, too, is not the one listed in the conference program. Instead, I have gathered notes from my own personal underground. The town I come from is situated in a semi-imaginary space I would call the East of Central Europe. And I am someone who is proud to have lived in Pericles's Golden Century. From this point of view, my paper may be considered a report on the life during neo-Periclism. My paper, "The Neighbors of Franz Kafka," is a semi-touristic and semi-political study. You soon will see why.

Not long ago, I happened to spend a few days in Prague and then a few days in my native Transylvania. My experience – at first purely that of a tourist – proved to be full of surprises. It especially cleared up a number of the unknown elements among which we have been living during the past two years. Undoubtedly, Prague is one of Europe's most beautiful cities. Perfectly preserved, it reigns in the middle of the continent, the undeniable capital of Central Europe. In between Franz Kafka and Vaclav Havel, the town has always proved to be a radiant point for European spirituality. And perhaps it was not by chance alone that Havel was brought to the Hradcany Palace, the official residence of the president of Czechoslovakia, which is just a few steps away from the Golden Lane, where at Number 22, one can find Kafka's house.

After the Second World War, Soviet-type socialism triumphed in Czechoslovakia, just as it did in Romania. In both countries, the troops of the Red empire blocked the natural mechanism of social life. As in the rest of East Central Europe, the sun rose from Moscow. And yet, what are the origins of the Czech abilities to preserve, unaltered, the distinctive marks of the past? Through what miracle did Prague succeed in surviving the steamroller of Communism, preserving its beauty? "It may be that the Czechs never had the money of a Ceausescu to destroy their city," my American friend, Jim Denton, suggested with black humor. But the Czechs did have August 1968, when they rose against Communism – the

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year 1968 when, in Romania, in a bizarre reaction to the Soviet invasion of Prague, Romanian youths joined, massively and enthusiastically, the Communist Party! The Czechs had Charter 77; we the Romanians, the 1977 earthquake. They had Havel; we, the Iliescu-Roman duo.

One cannot forget these things. The fiber of the nation was imbued with them; they exist regardless of the ups and downs of history. By contrast with other countries of the region, Czechoslovakia's integration into Europe had nothing to do with mere political bovaryism. Czechoslovakia is indeed part of Europe and not only geographically. The country is confronting at this moment a series of problems, such as nationalism. But these problems are part of the legacy the Soviets left everywhere. I would call them the diseases that come from the absence of dialogue. Incapable of protesting in front of Big Brother, the country finds aberrations that are surfacing only now, when his all-seeing eye closed for a moment. Beyond the problems inherent in any state in the process of changing its political regime, Czechoslovakia breathes an air of normality that shocks a tourist coming from the lower Danube. Yet the surprise experienced when coming into contact with a country that has regained normality is by no means bigger than the shock of readapting to the convulsions one has left at home. One returns to a country whose president knows the official results of a constitutional referendum days before they are officially announced. One returns to a country where the same president disregards the laws with Asiatic contempt, to a country where the constitution has been voted on, although a large majority of the citizens did not know what they voted for; to a country where my old aunt, an ardent monarchist, said "Yes" to a republican constitution because she was asked to do so by those on television; to a country where the rural population was threatened with the prospect of being forbidden to buy food from state-owned shops if it did not vote for the current government.

What a difference there is between the vote given by the European citizens of Czechoslovakia to Havel and the one given by my country cousin in Romania to Ion Iliescu! "But why?" I ask with amazement, "have you still not realized, even after two years, whom you are dealing with?"

The answer comes like thunder: "It suits us!"

"How do you mean?"

"Iliescu won't dismiss us from our jobs, and that suits us. With him, we have peace. You saw the Peasant Party leader, Ratiu, how he showed up at the voting, wearing a peasant's coat and bow-tie. Are we to expect justice from him? Or maybe from the King, in fact the ex-King, who wants to divide the country among his flock of daughters?"

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"Well, but what has Ratiu's bow-tie got to do with democracy and justice?" I almost shout, indignant at all these sartorial aesthetics on the mind of the Romanian peasant.

"We even liked it with the Communists," my aunt intervenes. "We fended very well for ourselves. We had everything we needed. And now, Iliescu gave us land as well. It was better at the cooperative farm, though."

No, there is not a trace of surrealism in these dialogues. I transcribed them as exactly as I could. But their truth is horrifying. For a large part of the Romanians, the idea of civil society does not exist. The only thing that matters is the small personal arrangement, the small, barely warm spot. Passivity and living with evil have defeated any kind of vitality.

In the past two years, a huge distance has divided Czechoslovakia and Romania. Heading decisively towards democracy, the Czechs and Slovaks cleaned up their country. In Romania, we are not willing to clean up our own houses. In Czechoslovakia, the parliament promulgated a law banning Communism. In Romania, the parliament rose up against a former prime minister who attacked – in highly moderated terms – the Communist structures still active in the society. In Czechoslovakia, a president admired throughout the world tries to establish consensus and bring social peace. In Romania, a president elected for the "tranquility" for the people, fishing in troubled waters, incites a fraction of the population, the miners, to ethnic extremism and national disintegration. If Czechoslovakia now has the chance to become the first ex-Communist country accepted into the European Community, President Iliescu has created all the premises for Romania to remain the last Sovietized country of Europe. While President Havel's speeches are models of Europeanism and truth, the public speeches of President Iliescu are samples of schematized Bolshevism, offered in homeopathic doses to a population that has been forced into numbness by cold, hunger, and ignorance.

Such comparisons could go on forever, but they lead nowhere. How can one compare the greatness of St. Havel's statue in Vaclavske Namesti with the shanties and Stalinist blocks of flats found in downtown Bucharest? How compare a people's decision to eliminate forever the remains of Communism with the guilty romance our brothers and cousins entertain with the National Salvation Front? The answer, desolate in its truth, is to be found in the reply, "It suits us."

Why does the National Salvation Front suit the Romanians? For a long time, I thought it was because they did not know the truth. I think now that it is precisely because they know the truth too well. A personal poll proved to me that the credible wing for the average voter is the Iliescu wing and not Petre Roman's reformist segment. What results from

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all this? Nothing, except the inertia of a large number of the voters – an inertia that goes hand-in-hand with a grain of dishonesty. All the rumors spread by television, by the disinformation network of the secret police, and by the trained men of the Party have an amazing effect on the masses. The most incredible slanders of the leaders of the opposition are repeated, commented upon, and amplified with a malicious pleasure that betrays, in many of us, the remains of a resentment susceptible to psychoanalysis: if we are dirty, then everyone has to be dirty. And the dirtiest of all, of course, are those in the opposition, because in the mind of the Romanian citizen, the opposition stands against him and not against an irresponsible power. That by tradition the Romanian citizen has always been on the side of the powers-that-be was borne out by the interwar free elections, where the winner was, in every case, the ruling party. Frail, cowed before history, seeking desperately the protection of the strong, Romanians fear any force that threatens to unbalance their relative inner comfort, a comfort which seems to be more than a desperate fight for subsistence but is, in fact, never more than just that.

The Iliescu regime has governed for two years, and the country has reached the abyss. Lies and corruption have seized the entire social mechanism. The current prime minister, Theodor Stolojan, speaks of economic and financial blocking. It would be more accurate to speak of the blocking of honesty and honor. The workers are driven to despair by the thought that foreigners will come and exploit them. At the same time, they envy the Czechs, the Hungarians, and the Poles, who are being helped by the West. We don't sell our country, but we require everything for free. This is the revenge of the old phrases, so familiar to us, "they give" and "they bring." Unfortunately, in today's world, nothing is given or brought anymore. Year after year, Romanian workers have been transforming our industrial plants into places of rest; now they are afraid they will lose their daily bread. They understand perfectly that if foreign investors arrived, they would get rid of a number of these unfortunate proletarians, who have already been transformed by Ceausescu into pseudo-*lumpen*. They do not seem to understand that the great father of the country himself, Ion Iliescu, will be obliged to do the very same thing. Having reached the deadline, the country's economy now faces the choice of bearing a brutal surgical intervention of acknowledging, in the near future, its own clinical death.

What the large mass of voters does not understand is that, once installed at the helm, Iliescu and his team would not hesitate to sacrifice those who helped to invest them with such authority. Unfortunately, the constitution gives them every right they need to do so. The voters do not want to understand – because "that suits us as well" – that for the

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sake of power, the National Salvation Front leadership is ready to do anything. It proved it in January, in February, in March, and in June of 1990, and it proved it as well in September 1991, and it will do so in the future whenever necessary. The star of Iliescu rises, shining with a glow of unanimity, as the most precious stone of a regime for which any minority – national, intellectual, professional – is considered, *ex officio*, criminal. Taking advantage of the troubled international political context, Iliescu is, in fact, only a step away from assuming dictatorial powers. In a Europe divided by irreconcilable conflicts and torn apart by fratricidal wars, a little despot from an isolated country between the Carpathians and the Danube bothers no one. As long as he maintains peace, his support is assured. Playing from the very beginning into the hands of party activists and the former repressive apparatus, Iliescu was sure to put up the high card. In Romania, where the shamelessness of politicians has reached the heights, no one is bothered that the heads of parliament are two old wrecks of Communism. No one minds that what sets the majority of the parliamentarians into motion is fidelity to the ancient Communist party apparatus, not an attachment to the values of democracy. The graceful speeches of men like Vasile Vacaru, Marian Enache, Dan Martian, Gheorghe Dumitrascu, Alexandru Birladeanu, Romulus Vulpescu will lead us, in an atmosphere of merry National Salvation Front democracy, to where Ceausescu wanted to lead us in a paranoic *allegro*: to the Asiatic border of Europe, into the land of enlightened dictators.

The most frightening thing in this situation is that the man of good will seems to have signed a treaty with the red beast. Deprofessionalized, underqualified, driven to despair by poverty and misery, living as if he were kept in a kind of reservation, always waiting to be told what to do, what to think, what to say, and what to eat, he is part of a perfectly maneuverable mass in a country of absolute cynicism. A television company in which disinformation has reached the acme of shamelessness is contributing fully to the moral ill-treatment of the mass of Romanian people. Meek and frightened, it will lose even the nothing it possesses and keep on voting for standing still in the communitarian utopia.

It is no less true, though, that the opposition did its best to amplify the fears of a population infantilized by a Communist regime, which in Romania rules with dehumanizing force. In a way, the opposition has been the didactic material for the clever activist propaganda disguised as the herald of democracy. "You see," the propagandists used to say, "you see where these enemies of the people want to lead you? They will throw you out of your jobs, and they will abandon you to the foreigners who come here to get rich!" Under these circumstances, dialogue becomes impossible. In all the other ex-Communist countries, Bolshevik

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reformists had power for only a few months. In Romania, amidst the applause of a majority too frightened to face the truth, neo-Communist dictatorship triumphs openly.

There is such a thing as the logic of history. In Prague, Vaclav Havel comes to power and installs himself in the palace that belonged to the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire of the German nations. The palace is but a few steps from Franz Kafka's house. In Bucharest, the roulette wheel of history having been spun, accident is abolished forever. In a Kafkaesque Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu is followed, quite logically, by Ion Iliescu.

William Phillips: Thank you. Before inviting questions from the audience, I would like to take a few moments to emphasize several of the minor themes of this conference. The major themes, of course, have been focused on the heroic efforts of dissidents to combat dictatorship and censorship, and on the lies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. One minor theme was emphasized by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, who called our attention to the fact that not all intellectuals and writers are noble figures, that not even are all of them noble savages, and that especially in the history of the West there have been a number of writers and intellectuals who have expressed various kinds of hatred and prejudice. Anti-Semitism, as many of you know, has been espoused by many prominent intellectuals and writers in the West.

Another minor theme has been the question raised by Czesław Milosz, Saul Bellow, Ralph Ellison, and Joseph Brodsky as to what the responsibility of the writer and the intellectual actually is. Apparently, one distinction should be made, between the writer and intellectual as citizen and the writer and intellectual in terms of his own special medium. It was brought up that a writer also owes something to his craft. Brodsky said, for example, that the society doesn't owe anything to the writer, and that we do not know what the writer owes to society. But we should not lose sight of the fact that the writer's main responsibility is to his craft. Otherwise we are left with social realism.

One other minor theme, just barely touched upon, has been the kind of confusion that occurs between the left and the right. In Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, opposition has not come from what should be called the left; however, I do not know what to call it. Some people have called it a conservative reaction; perhaps we can call it a classic assertion of liberal values in those regions. In this country and in parts of Europe, for example, opposition is seen mostly on the part of what is called the left, although the left is really in a Rip Van Winkle state. In my opinion, the left in this country hasn't awakened yet to the

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new realities that face the world, especially as they are revealed in the liberating revolutions of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

One final point: perhaps bad governments bring out the best in writers and intellectuals. In this country, most literature does not take the form of any kind of dissidence. Most poetry in this country, as you know, is occupied with personal and psychological questions. I am not saying that's wrong. Perhaps that is the sense of what writers feel is the proper métier and response to their experience in this country. Yet, obviously, different kinds of social conditions do create different kinds of writing and literature.

Question: I teach French here at Rutgers-Newark, and I'm proud of all of you, of this conference, and of Professor Kurzweil. I have a question for Mr. Mihaies, but first I would like to comment on one of your remarks, Mr. Phillips. I disagree profoundly with you that most writing in this country is personal and psychological. I think you tend to ignore the last twenty years' of resurgence of writing by women that has certainly had political themes.

Mr. Mihaies, I was wondering if you are familiar with the British playwright, Carol Churchill. Her work, *Mad Forest,* is about Romania. One of the premises of the play, produced here in New York on a limited run last December, suggests that the regime of Ceausescu actually staged the revolution and goes on to demonstrate the confusion of the Romanian people and the variety of its population. Do you give that any credence?

Mircea Mihaies: I wouldn't call the events of December 1989 a revolution, because revolution happens according to a program; obviously there was no explicit program of events in Romania at that time. The events were absolutely miraculous, a pretext for the creation of so many scripts or scenarios that reflected our experiences in Romania that I can't tell you if the one scenario you bring up is acceptable from the historical point of view. In my opinion, what happened in December of 1989 was due to the external pressure of what was happening in all the other East European countries, something we all expected. Objectively speaking, everyone had had enough of Ceausescu and his regime. To assume that, based on this not very spectacular situation, Ceausescu and his regime staged a coup requires a lot of imagination.

Question: It's been a very stimulating conference, and I agree with Mr. Phillips that one of the themes that has come up is the heroic behavior of dissidents over the years. But there is also the theme of the heroic stance

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of intellectuals versus the rest of the people, the masses, the attitude of thinly-veiled contempt toward the masses. There was much applause for the revolutions of 1989, when the masses rose behind grand, liberal universalist slogans. And yet, one year later, when the masses are no longer united behind liberal intellectuals, there is a kind of triumphant yet defensive mood. There is triumph at the great things that liberal intellectuals and liberal democracy have brought about, without any awareness of some of their limitations. We have Mannheim's kind of applause for a free-floating intelligentsia without Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, without his understanding of how intellectuals may benefit from the changes. It seems we have to understand the new kind of political arrangement, to understand that opposition to intellectuals is more than something to be feared. Is there nothing intellectuals have done wrong? Is it only that there are some who are hate-mongering? There are certain dynamics, from the Communist and the post-Communist periods, that intellectuals have not adjusted to well. In Tatyana Tolstaya's theme of nationalism versus imperialism, with her defense of imperialism, I saw a kind of self-irony that has not been sufficiently developed on a larger scale. It is a theme that I would like to point to and would like to see addressed here.

William Phillips: Would anyone here like to comment?

Mircea Mihaies: My position is far from being one of contempt. I would call it rather a bitterness and a desperate compassion. Perhaps we intellectuals have no more patience, because we read foreign papers and watch foreign television. So on occasion, we see and understand earlier than the rest of the population what is happening everywhere else. Perhaps what is going on in Romania right now is quite normal, but we have waited for such a long time. All of our lives we have lived with Communism and now, for the first time, we have seen that it is possible to change the political situation. We want it to change right now, this very moment. I think I share this feeling with many intellectuals of my still-young generation in Romania. We are eager and impatient to have things change, to finally consider ourselves Europeans. I think you have to understand my comments from that point of view.

Eda Kriseová: I would like to add that we are somehow surprised that some of our values are not shared by everyone. We thought that people wanted to be free, but in fact, I'm very disappointed that not all of them want freedom. Instead, they are looking for their country to be a parent. They are like children in the wild forest looking for an adult who will

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say, "You should do this; you shouldn't do that." This is part of our disappointment.

William Phillips: I take it that is the heritage of Communism.

Eda Kriseová: That is not only the heritage of Communism. I think people are the same all over the world.

William Phillips: We should be grateful to the commentator from the audience who just reminded us that intellectuals are neither intellectual angels nor moral angels.

Question: I have a question for Eda Kriseová. I was fortunate to be in Czechoslovakia in 1978, and I saw a work in Prague that won an international award in 1968 at the Montreal World's Fair. Prague has the most beautiful artistic work I have ever witnessed – music, theater, and film all at once. That one particular work I saw in Prague was so moving that I was wondering, in light of the art being produced at the time in Prague, whether it possibly expressed people's aspirations for freedom.

Eda Kriseová: Yes, it was an expression of the aspirations for freedom. But while we can say that people made their art to combat the system in some way, I think it's worth noting that Prague has a long cultural tradition, and people were doing what came naturally to them.

Question: I am co-director of a project on the arts based in Prague. I'm wondering about your Romanian neighbor's comment about the Castle and its heritage, about Rudolph II's occupation of Prague, the architectural location and heritage. What about the history of the Castle? President Havel has been strongly associated with the First Republic and in some cases criticized for his vivid memory of what seem to be quite good things to remember. In terms of your description of how a writer moves into a position of political power and responsibility, what is the historical reference for you? I don't necessarily mean the Holy Roman Empire, but the architecture. Where do you look, if you do look to models and precedence, both negative and positive, given the presence of history embodied by Prague? Is that in any sense an influence on your own position?

Eda Kriseová: Of course we are very grateful to have the democratic tradition of the First Republic. There are people still living who remember the democratic system in Czechoslovakia. President Havel is somehow forging a connection between the First Republic and the contemporary

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leadership. This is the best tradition we have. I think it is very telling that President Havel comes from a patriotic bourgeois Czech family. This seems like the happy ending of a fairy tale. I should add that President Havel has a strong and natural interest in the architecture and development of Prague Castle, which is not one structure but a collection of buildings representing every major style from the past thousand years. To work in Prague Castle is to be conscious of history – deep history – and it does influence one's approach to life.

Question: My ears perked up when Mr. Milosz said that as a rule dissident writers are not nationalists. I got the impression that Poles were nationalists, because Polish writers do not show much concern for the Germans, Slovaks, and so on. If I'm wrong, can you give me some examples of dissident Polish writers who showed concern for these others?

Czeslaw Milosz: I made a distinction between nationalism as a doctrine and nationalism as a submission to certain pressures from one's community. We observe a very strange duality in Poland. Poland is a Catholic country, but its writers are agnostics or atheists. The same duality applies to writers and nationalism. Within the community of Polish writers, there are many more differences than in the public at large. This may be a source of conflict, of course, but writers shouldn't be accused. Few writers in today's intellectual community could be said to be responsible for national hatred. There were some writers in the past, during the period between the two wars, who did incite racism and injustice. Writers now are the most moderate and the most peaceful element.

Question: I am a codirector of the Project for the Arts in Central Europe in Prague. I was struck by the correspondence between the remarks of the Russian and Czech speakers and the moderator. Valery Golofast spoke of the fact that technology and totalitarianism seem to go hand-in-hand, and he questioned the role of the artist and the intellectual as citizen. What role should the intellectual play in the critique of society? What happens when artists and intellectuals no longer serve as critics of society? What role do intellectuals and artists play when critical responses to society are no longer needed?

I think the comments about what is actually happening in Czechoslovakia are very instructive, especially about the phenomenon of artists and intellectuals getting involved in serving in the new governments, about artists and intellectuals coming down from their ivory towers and getting their hands dirty. However, I think the precautionary

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remarks of Mr. Phillips are also very important. How does one move beyond the temptations of power and the role of ideology in politics? The artist is particularly well placed to do so, because the needs of his creativity to break new ground demand that he not toe a particular line. How do you position the artist in the role of citizen and in providing leadership to those people who are looking for the "hand to lead them out of the forest"? Would either of these speakers comment on this?

Valery Golofast: I think that to be a critic of modern culture is not the only function of intellectuals, in the sense of being destructive or pointing to deficiencies. In Russia, the most important function of intellectuals has been rather conservative; they have looked at modern culture and have synthesized new or existing human history. This is an ever-growing task, which may be directly related to current social or practical politics, to economics or human suffering. It requires reflection and psychological depth, the capabilities of cultivated intellectual or artistic minds. That is why it is necessary to have some distance between the practical and the creative, the artistic intellectual self who exists independently of one's everyday experience as a national, political creature of consumption.

William Phillips: Maybe we can hope that society will evolve in the direction of decent governments and decent societies to relieve artists and intellectuals from these grave and momentous responsibilities that we keep thrusting upon ourselves and each other.

Before we end, I'd like to say one more thing. Edith Kurzweil will moderate the last session. She has been the engineer and the soul of this conference, so may I suggest a round of applause for her?

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The Humanities and Culture Heroes

Edith Kurzweil: This is the last session of our memorable conference. I want to thank all of you, and particularly our wonderful panelists, for being with us. We will begin with Doris Lessing.

Doris Lessing: The title of my talk is "Unexamined Mental Attitudes Left Behind by Communism." I think people from East Europe and Central Europe will recognize that in what I am going to say, I will be talking as a Western European. I'm going to make half a dozen points, each one, of course, oversimplified. All of them illustrate the fact that while we have seen the apparent death of Communism, ways of thinking that were born under Communism or strengthened by Communism still govern our lives.

The very first point is language. It is not a new thought that Communism debased language and with language, thought. There is a Communist jargon recognizable after a single sentence. Few people have not joked in their youth about concrete steps, contradictions, the interpenetration of opposites and all the rest. The first time I saw that mind-deadening slogans had the power to take wing and fly far from their origins was in the fifties when I read a leader in the Times and saw them in use: "The demo last Saturday was irrefutable proof that the concrete situation. . . ." Words that had been as confined to the left as corralled animals had passed into general use and, with them, ideas. One might read whole articles in the conservative and liberal press that were Marxist, but the writers didn't know it.

There is an aspect of this heritage that is much harder to see. Even five or six years ago *Izvestia*, *Pravda*, and a thousand other Communist papers were written in a language that seemed designed to fill up as much space as possible without actually saying anything – because, of course, it was dangerous to take up positions that might have to be defended. Now, all these newspapers have rediscovered the use of language. But the heritage of dead and empty language these days is still to be found in some areas of academia and particularly in some areas of sociology, psychology, and some literary criticism.

Recently, a young friend of mine from North Yemen saved up, with much sacrifice, every bit of money he could to travel to that fount of excellence, Britain, to study the branch of sociology that teaches how to spread Western know-how and expertise to benighted nations. It cost him £8000, and that was five years ago. I asked to see his study material,

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and he showed me a thick tome, written so badly and in such ugly empty jargon it was hard even to follow. There were several hundred pages, and the ideas in it could easily been put into ten pages. This kind of book is written by people who were Marxists or have been taught by Marxists. Students come from "backward" and closed countries to be taught how to write in this debased language. I have seen people, in Zimbabwe this time, introduced to the English language in this pedantic, empty jargon. They will believe that this is the English language and that this is how they should write and speak it.

Yes, I do know the obfuscations of academia did not begin with Communism, as Swift, for one, tells us, but the pedantries and verbosity of Communism had their roots in German academia. And now it has become a kind of mildew blighting the whole world. One may spend a morning in the kind of bookshop that sells student textbooks and only with difficulty find books that are fresh and alive. How to stop this self-perpetuating machine for dulling thought? For sometimes I do see it as one of those mechanisms set to revolve forever inside a vacuum within a sealed glass case. How to break the glass and let in the air? Perhaps this will turn out to be the ideas themselves concealed in the dead language, for they can be useful and full of insights from the research departments of universities – where, as I pointed out before, work is being done that could, if we let it, transform our societies. Full of insights about how the human animal actually does behave instead of how we think it does. These are often presented for the first time in unreadable language. This is one of the paradoxes of our time.

The second point is linked with the first. Powerful ideas affecting our behavior can be visible in brief sentences or even a phrase. All writers get asked by interviewers this question: "Do you think a writer should . . . ?" The question always has to do with a political stance. Note that the assumption behind the words is that all writers should do the same thing, whatever that may be. There is a long history behind this. Let us go no further back than the nineteenth century in Russia, where there were great critics: Belinsky, Dobrolubov, Chernyshevsky, and the rest. They wanted writers to be concerned with social problems. All the great writers that we now describe as the golden tradition of Russian literature had to endure criticism from this point of view, some of it on a very high level. Yesterday, Donald Fanger explained that the Russian novel contains in itself all areas of sociology and social criticism. But I do believe that this is because this is what the writers were like and not because of what the critics were saying. As we say in Britain, "the proof of the pudding is in the eating." In all these great writers' work there is no moment when there is that dull thump that comes when writers have been writing because they felt they ought to. All these writers continued

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to write from a much older tradition than their critics. If a writer writes truthfully out of individual experience then what is written inevitably speaks for other people. For thousands of years storytellers have taken for granted that their experiences must be general. It never occurred to them that it is possible to divorce oneself from life or to "live in an ivory tower." It will be seen that this view of storytelling ends the interminable debate about form and content that still bedevils literature in some provincial universities. If these writers in Russia had not claimed their right to an individual conscience rather than a collective one, we would not now be remembering and reading Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Turgenev, and all the rest of that dazzling galaxy.

We saw what happened when this formula, that writers must write about social injustice, took power in 1917. It became socialist realism. Anyone who had the misfortune to read through a lot of that stuff, which I did in London early in the fifties for a Communist publisher, knows that socialist realism created novels written in a language as dead as the books already mentioned as a product of academia. Why? Writers know instinctively that a recipe for writing dead books is to write because you ought. This is because you are writing out of a different area of your mind. I shall never forget an exchange between a writer and an interviewer on television. The interviewer said, "Among the influences that shaped your work, would you say that Heidegger was the most important?"

The writer replied, "You don't understand. When you describe a scene, let's say at the breakfast table, you have to know what your hero is eating. Bacon and eggs? Pancakes? Is it a cold morning? Is the sun shining in? Is there a smell of burning leaves? Did he sleep with his wife last night? Does she love him? What color shirt does he have on? Is the dog there waiting for tidbits? You have to know all this even if you don't describe it because this is what brings the scene to life."

"Oh, I see, then you describe yourself as a realist?"

Never the twain shall meet. And they can't meet because it's two different parts of the mind speaking. One is the critical part; the other one is the holistic part which is probably situated somewhere in the solar plexus. Two parallel lines: the writer is talking about "the fine delight that fathers thought," in Hopkins's wonderful phrase. The critic is talking out of the same spirit that pervaded socialist realism and before that the nineteenth-century Russian critics, and since I am sure the mindsets of Communism were patterned by religion, Christianity and the dialectics of Judaism. A biography of Cervantes tells us he had the Inquisition breathing down his neck all his life. The questions: "Should a writer . . . ?" Ought writers to . . . ?" have a long history that seems unknown to the people who so casually use them. Another is "commitment" – so much

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in vogue not long ago. Is so-and-so a committed writer? Are you a committed writer? "Committed to what?" the writer might ask.

"Oh well, if you don't know, I can't tell you," comes the reproof, full of moral one-upmanship. A successor to commitment is "raising consciousness." This is double-edged. The people whose consciousness is being raised may be given information they most desperately lack and need, may be given moral support they need. But the process nearly always means that the pupil gets only the propaganda the instructor approves of. Raising consciousness, like commitment, like political correctness, is a continuation of that old bully, the Party Line.

A very common way of thinking in literary criticism is not seen as a consequence of Communism, but it is. Every writer has the experience of being told that a novel, a story, is "about" something or other. I wrote a story, *The Fifth Child*, which was at once pigeonholed as being "about" the Palestinian problem, genetic research, feminism, anti-Semitism, and so on. A journalist from France walked into my living-room and before she even sat down said, "Of course *The Fifth Child* is about AIDS." An effective conversation-stopper, I do assure you. But what is interesting is the habit of mind that has to analyze a literary work like this. If you say, "Had I wanted to write about AIDS or the Palestinian problem, I would have written a pamphlet," you tend to get baffled stares, such an unfamiliar thought has it become. That a work of the imagination has to be "really" about some problem, is, again, an heir of socialist realism, of the infamous Zhdanov. To write a story for the sake of storytelling will not do; it is frivolous, not to say reactionary. Whole literary departments in a thousand universities are in the grip of this way of thinking, and yet the history of storytelling, of literature, tells us that there has never been a story that does not illuminate human experience in one way or another. The demand that stories must be "about" something is Communist thinking and, further back, comes from religious thinking, with its desire for improving books as simple-minded as the messages on samplers. "Little birds in their nests agree." "Good children must, good children ought, do what they are told, do what they are taught." I found that on a wall in a hotel in Wales.

If, for example, a writer should timidly remark, "My book, *Eternal Springs*, is not at all about water shortage in the Middle East," the reply is that the writer has no idea at all of what he or she is "really" writing about. A great deal has been said and is being said about political correctness, but I think we might usefully note that this is yet again self-appointed vigilante committees inspired by ideology. Of course, I am not suggesting that the torch of Communism has been handed on to the political correctors. I am suggesting that habits of mind have been ab-

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sorbed, often without knowing it. There is obviously something very attractive about telling other people what to do. I'm putting it in this nursery way rather than in more intellectual language because I think it is nursery behavior, very primitive stuff. Deep in the human mind is the need to order, control, set bounds. Art, the arts in general, are always unpredictable, maverick, and tend at their best to be uncomfortable. Literature in particular has always inspired the house committees, the Zhdanovs, the vigilantes into, at best, fits of moralizing, and at worst into persecution. It troubles me that political correctness does not seem to know what its exemplars and predecessors are; it troubles me a good deal more that they may know and do not care.

Does political correctness have a good side? Yes, it does, for it makes us re-examine attitudes, and that is always useful. The trouble is that, as with all popular movement, the lunatic fringe so quickly ceases to be a fringe; the tail begins to wag the dog. For every woman or man who is quietly and sensibly using the idea to look carefully at our assumptions, there are twenty rabble-rousers whose real motive is desire for power over others. The fact that they see themselves as antiracists, or feminists, or whatever does not make them any less rabble-rousers.

Political correctness did not invent intolerance in universities, which is an evident child of Communism. If intolerance, not to say despotism, governed universities in Communist countries, then the same attitude of mind has infected areas in the West and often sets the tone in a university. We have all seen it. For instance, a professor friend of mine describes how when students kept walking out of classes on genetics and boycotting visiting lecturers whose points of view did not coincide with their ideology, he invited them to his study for discussion and the viewing of a video that factually refuted such ideology. Half a dozen youngsters in their uniform of jeans and T-shirts filed in, sat down, kept silent while he reasoned with them, kept their eyes down while the video was shown and then, as one, walked out. The students might very well have been shocked to hear that their behavior was a visual representation of the closed minds of young Communist activists.

Again and again in Britain, we see in town councils and in school councils, that headmistresses or headmasters or teachers are being hounded by groups and cabals of witch-hunters, using the most dirty and often cruel tactics. They claim their victims are racist or in some way reactionary. Again and again, an appeal to higher authorities proves that the campaign tactics have been unfair. This happened to a young friend of mine in Cape Town, whom the fanatical Moslems and the hardline Communists joined forces to expel. They had done the same to her predecessor, and doubtless they are now at work on her successor. The victims were white. Were they racists? They were not. Unlikely bedfellows?

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Not at all. I am sure that millions of people, the rug of Communism pulled out from under them, are searching frantically, perhaps without even knowing it, for another dogma. Some have already found a home with the fanatical Moslems.

The next point seems to have on the face of it little connection with the others, but I think it underlies them all. It is excitement, pleasure in strong sensations, a search for ever-stronger stimuli. What could be more pleasurable when in one's twenties – the age when millions of young people have tortured or murdered others in the name of the forward march of mankind – than the excitements of being the only possessors of the truth? Revolutionary politics, the house committees, the vigilante slogans, are intoxicating drugs. In Spain not long ago I met a youth, of the same stuff as Byron, who said it was the great regret of his life that he was too young to have been in Paris in '68. I asked why – when that revolution had been a failure? He was amazed I could ask. It must have been so exciting, said he. Bliss in that dawn to be alive. Bliss being the point, being turned on, getting a buzz, a high, a thrill, a fix. This set of mind was summed up by one of our political commentators thus: he was talking about demonstrations that seem to have little point, that is, from the point of view of actually achieving something. He said: A large part of left-wing politics these days has nothing to do with ends. The ends are not the point. The means are the point.

There must be hundreds of thousands of people, now middle-aged and in positions of authority, whose most vibrant experiences were the events of '68. Like a war for soldiers, '68 was a high point of their lives. No, Communism did not invent demonstrations, riots, marches, petitions, or even revolutions. The nineteenth-century was full of them, 1848 being only part of it and before that the French Revolution, that great mother of so many of our mind-sets. We can't really blame Jean Jacques. He didn't invent sensation and excitement and bliss; he didn't invent the worship of sensibility and elation. He merely mirrored these ideas in books that are still instructive. Exciting ideas have always swept across countries, nations, the world. There have always been people high on ideas. They used to be religious emotions, a fact we might usefully keep in our minds. (They still are religious in some areas, and spreading fast.) But in all our minds are patterns that govern our behavior which we do not examine.

It was, at least until very recently, taken absolutely for granted that revolution is a nobler thing than the ballot box. It was and often still is taken for granted that the right place for a serious young person is with the revolutionaries in Cuba or Nicaragua, with dissidents, or protesting the suffering of the underprivileged, or on a picket line anywhere at all. We have watched successive waves of young people from the West trav-

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eling to the scenes of new revolutions, to Gdansk, or Czechoslovakia, or Berlin at the fall of the Wall – anywhere at all where there is strong popular emotion. If half of a certain stratum of youth has been off seeking thrills on the road to Katmandu, then the other half has been getting high on a revolution somewhere or other. The last thing they ever think of is staying at home and working for the good of their own country – even to say it bores them, inspires a yawn. For one thing, their own countries are judged as being beneath contempt and not worth their attention. Thus arose the paradox that countries, like those of Western Europe, seen to people suffering under Communism as unreachable paradises of freedom and plenty, were continually being represented as unendurable by young Westerners in search elsewhere for the good and the truth. Because of this unrecognized need to experience suffering, persecution, oppression, successive political movements have invented or exaggerated the oppression in Western countries.

This phenomenon has been analyzed, but I wonder what are the psychological mechanisms underlying the need to denigrate one's own country and seek eternally for paradises somewhere else? I think one reason is that few people on the left – and far beyond the left – have not been soaked in tales of persecution from other countries. Many have spent happy years fantasizing about being in prison and enduring it all with fortitude and heroism, being tortured by interrogators and outwitting them – being clever enough to immediately identify the good and the bad interrogators. Yet these are people who will never be in prison for political reasons, unless they work really hard at it. The secret minds of these Walter Mittys of revolution are landscapes of disaster, tyranny, torture, prison, car bombs, Semtex, and heroic suffering. I personally believe that these hidden landscapes have and do contribute to the continuation of torture and oppression; that they are the reason why ordinary social or political effort in peaceful and democratic countries have proved so uninviting to so many young people. They yearn for the madder music and for the stronger wine of revolution.

My next point is a development of the last. It is that a great many people love violence and killing. Of course they have always existed and always will, but I think under ideal conditions only as a minority. One result of our history of two centuries of revolution, that is, of violence sanctified by high motive, is that there are many people you would not expect to identify with killing and torture who do. In Europe that type of person classified by the sociologists as "tender-hearted" – who hates capital punishment, flogging, bad prison sentences and the sufferings of the under-privileged – and who continues to agitate against these things, often accepts terrorism for good causes. The romance of violence, which began in our time in the French Revolution, was enhanced by the Rus-

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sian Revolution, and then the Chinese Revolution, and means the left-wing and liberals – millions of people – have schizophrenia. You can see it easily in the tolerance, not to say worship, of the I.R.A. murderers or in the Red Brigades in Italy. Few people of a certain age group in Italy have not had friends in the Red Brigades, or even for a time were not themselves in the Red Brigades. It was the chic thing to do. Hundreds of young people with the highest possible motives supported murder for political reasons. Most of the Red Brigades were not deprived people. What they all had in common, of course, was the war just behind them. Granted it was a bad and ugly war in Italy, though we tend to forget that, and war brutalizes all of us. But these were "the tender-hearted," dreaming of gentle, fruitful and noncorrupt futures. Those that remained in the organization became merciless and brutal killers, even if most have now had reverse conversions and become good citizens. They were and are still sometimes admired precisely for their brutality. There are people on the left who still defend them. Why? I think the reason is, again, revolutionary romanticism.

And now my last point, but I am leaving out a dozen other ways, of which we are hardly aware, in which I think our minds have been set by Communism. I think that the left-wing, the social, even liberal movements of Europe have been terminally damaged because the progressive imagination was captured by the Soviet experience. The Russian Revolution, the Soviet Union, was a paradigm, whether seen as a success or as a failed experiment which we could better. For decades, for half a century, for three-quarters of a century, all the "tender-hearted" people longing for better things were preoccupied with the Soviet Union. With its history of murder, mass murder, show trials. A history, and this I'm sure is the important thing in the long run, of failure. The entire "progressive" movement of Europe has had its imagination in thrall to the Soviet experience, an experience in fact irrelevant to Europe.

It would easily be possible to make an alternative reality, a history of Europe that had made a decision to develop socialism, or even a just society, without any reference at all to the Soviet Union. We must remember, I think, that because of the Soviet Union it has been impossible even to consider creating a just society that is not either socialist or Communist.We did not have to identify with the Soviet Union, with its seventy-odd years of logic-chopping, of idiotic rhetoric, brutality, concentration camps, pogroms against the Jews. Again and again, failure. And, from our point of view, most important, the thousand mind-wriggling ways of defending failure. I think the history of Europe would have been very different. Socialism would not now be so discredited, and above all, our minds would not automatically fall into the habit of "capitalism or socialism."

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The story of the Soviet Union in the last eighty years has been a tragedy, for the Russians and the other Communist nations now free. It has also been a tragedy, on a somewhat smaller scale of course, for Europe. Europe has been corrupted by it in obvious and not so obvious ways, to what an extent it is too early to say. It has been corrupted because we've allowed our imaginations to be totally preoccupied with other peoples' experience and not with our own, for one reason or another. I think that it has been suggested here at this conference, many times, that there are reasons that have not yet been examined. My conclusion is that until we know the patterns that dominate our thinking and can recognize them in the various forms they emerge in, we shall be helpless and without real choice. We need to learn to watch our minds, our behavior. We need to do some rethinking. It is a time, I think, for definitions.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you, Doris. The next speaker is Jakov Lind.

Jakov Lind: It seems that my theme, "Changing Languages," has found a wonderful introduction in Doris's remarks about what a tragedy for the Russians Communism has been. Yes, it was a tragedy, which I would like to pin down in my comments. It definitely was a tragedy for my people, the Jews. I am a story-teller by profession, not a politician, not a scientist, a literary critic, or philosopher. I will read you a story, just an ordinary story. It happens to be my personal story, but it's not mine alone. It is totally subjective, as all genuine stories are, a story unadorned by garlands or perfumed petals. It is not romantic at all.

I did not do too badly for many years as an author who wrote in the German language. I could have gone on writing in German. I had done nothing else all my life. And then, suddenly, about in 1968, a younger generation of restless students began to climb the barricades. In Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, Rome, they protested what from my point of view seemed to be their own bored, frustrated, uneasy experience in postwar Europe. At the same time, while they were talking about Ceaucescu, I decided that it was time for a change for me, too. The young were smashing the last bit of sense of a mentally deranged society that had been trying to rehabilitate itself ever since the end of World War Two. The Baader-Meinhofs, the Red Armies, were breaching the front lines of animal humanity, with bombs and bullets – in the name of greater humanism. None of the "pamphleted sap," as I call it, produced in French, German, Italian, Dutch, was translatable into English; it just read like trash.

I needed my personal revolution; I felt I had to keep moving westward. Claustrophobia, nausea, asthma, whatever you call it – but it was

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not physical. It was an immense desire for a fresh breeze of Atlantic air. I lived in London at the time, but I was still stuck by my tongue to the mother language, held by a last bit of umbilical cord. And I had to cut it. I removed myself from the mother tongue, although I then realized that I had actually done so a long, long time ago, when I was still in her lap.

Does one really change language, or does language change us by putting different words into our mouths which, even though they might sound different for a moment, are still our own? I'll have to trace my steps back to prewar Vienna, wartime Amsterdam, and wartime Germany, where I learned all sorts of useful things on this subject. If I seem at moments to stray into the thickets of detail, please bear with my *recherché* into a time not lost on anyone.

I grew up in Vienna during the thirties, not the best of times in which to grow up; it was if anything the time of the last moment to get out of Vienna, Austria, and Europe, preferably as fast as possible and as far away as possible. Everyone planned a private exodus. Some dreamed of Shanghai, Melbourne, Santiago de Chile, Ottawa, Montreal, New York – exotic names of cities we had a hard time finding in our school atlas. Unlike our closest relatives, we negotiated with mysterious authorities who would grant the visas to Shanghai and New York, London and Paris. We at home had chosen Palestine, the land God promised to us and not to the Arabs. It was a promise the British Prime Minister Lord Balfour had reconfirmed in 1917 through the Balfour Declaration, which we in our Zionist youth club had to learn by heart. It was now high time to take up the promise of both the Lord and Lord Balfour. With Hitler and Himmler established in Berlin, it wouldn't take long before it would be our turn to pack up and run. The Russian-Polish war of the early twenties, following the battles between the Reds and the Whites, had washed new waves of immigrants to the land of the Jews that the Arabs claim to be theirs. And in the thirties, a mere ten years later, German Jews arrived by the thousands. They too had discovered there was no alternative.

We believed that Zionists were ahead of our time, more inventive and progressive – the word in German was *fortschrittlich* – than socialists and Communists, who were then in vogue. Zionists were accused of being chauvinist and reactionary, concerned only with narrow nationalist interests, in contrast to the great International Socialist brotherhood of men which claimed to love all races, all religions, all colors, and especially of having the Jewish genius to raise funds and write pamphlets for the great cause. As many still do to this day under different pseudonyms, Communist, socialist, and Bundist Jews deeply disliked Zionists. Zionism did not promise to solve all the problems of the world, but, to start

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with, it wanted to give a little urgently-needed Jewish self-reliance. The most practical thing one can do in response to a fellow man not enamored of your presence is to get out of his way, not to argue ethics with him, something Jews traditionally learned and love to do. The choice was either to reclaim the land of Israel now through physical labor and be ready to defend the claim, or to wait in the coffeehouses of Vienna and Berlin for what they had in mind for us. They were those who hate Jews for no reason except that they are allergic to them. What they had in mind for us one could read on the front pages of the papers. We were ready to pack up and go, the sooner the better. Being willing to leave was not the same as being allowed in. The Arabs protested and rioted. The wisdom in London was to try appeasing the Arabs, not because they had attacked isolated Jewish settlements but because they had assassinated a British High Commissioner and blown up vulnerable military targets such as railroad tracks and the oil pipeline from Iraq to Haifa. The news of what went on in Palestine made our departure from Vienna even more pressing. And our very presence in Israel, so we believed, would help strengthen our side. We too had our idealism. We believed that man is his own master and no one's slave. We were taught to trust in ourselves, in our strengths, in the boundless creative energy of mere willpower that could move mountains faster than God created them, turn desert to fertile land, swamps to gardens, and make normal, ordinary citizens out of a nation of perennial refugees. This kind of thing one could believe in more than in God's promises.

Pioneers were needed to do the menial work of the Messiah, and thousands like myself wanted to be pioneers. Zionism was idealism, and idealism was the religion of the thirties. But we were ahead of our time in that we distrusted completely the Communists' internationalism and insisted on our national homeland in Palestine. We insisted that we were a nation and not a race and also that we were perhaps a religion – in an unorthodox, secular way. We demanded from ourselves deafness to the secular and religious authorities who did nothing for us except preach obedience to the Czar or the Kaiser, the virtues of the upright citizen who should pay his taxes and refrain from stealing or swindling, so as not to give the Jews a bad name, not provoke. Meanwhile, the majority considered that our political activities were provocative, only semi-serious; that our agricultural settlements and cities were an economic disaster close to bankruptcy (which was partly true); that our defense was a joke accompanied by heroic songs; that our efforts to deal peacefully with the native Arab population, which also had acquired a few rights over the centuries, were a scam. And as you see, not much has changed today.

Zionism was not appreciated by ninety percent of Viennese Jews. Yet I never was taught that Jews are more intelligent or cleverer than others.

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In fact, I believed the very opposite and saw them as exceedingly stupid. They did not share our philosophy: Action Now or Aliya, the mystical Hebrew term for it, meaning two things in one. Settling in the land of Israel is linked to the experience of rejuvenation, a kind of renaissance. Ours was in every respect an un-Jewish philosophy, not the old "eat first and talk later" school, but "act now, talk later, and forget about eating altogether." The fleshpots of Egypt are not transportable, so you'd better forget them!

Despite all the good will and sympathy for our cause there was among a gentile, world public, the British government also had Arab interests to consider. And besides, words like assassination and sabotage could not be taken lightly or ignored. Palestine remained more or less closed to mass immigration. In 1937, one year before the Anschluss, we did know what was coming. Don't believe those who tell you we were shortsighted, provincial fogheads, naive or ignorant. Not even children were naive, far from it. Everyone wanted to get out, to live. But to live had become a privilege of those who know how to get hold of the right papers. Ultimately, this depended on the internal politics of internal Christian affairs, in which some Jews may have had a voice but in which none had any final say.

European-Christian ethics were once more being put to the test. When war broke out, Europe showed its enlightened face, for instance when the Russian Communists delivered German Communists to the Gestapo until June 22, 1941, the day before the Germans invaded. Let's not just mention the Jews. It became a test of ethics, of principles, of values that left most of Europe in ruins and a starving population, millions sick in body and soul, and fifty million dead at the end of a war which, had it lasted a mere few months longer and left not a single soul alive in the penal colonies, would have become what Kafka had foreseen twenty years earlier. This was the other appeal of the Zionists: "Don't let them kill you! Don't follow their orders. If they ever catch you, try to escape. And don't let them catch you to begin with."

A few years later, by this time in Amsterdam, I could test my courage after I had lost all my fears. The insane courage it took for our non-Jewish friends in the underground to supply us with forged identity papers was inspiration enough to try to survive.

I had been writing since my schooldays in Vienna, and of course I continued in Holland. In fact, I couldn't stop writing – poems, sketches for the stage, essays or stories, anything that came to mind. Writing and fighting were the same to me. Compared to learning to fight the fear of the gentile neighbor who could sell you or just give you away for free, to showing yourself unafraid and feeling unafraid, learning how to write seemed like child's play. It wasn't. The harder it was, the more I loved

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with the passion of a flagellant, the devotion of a disciple being dictated to but left alone to affix his own corrections. First and last lines, beginnings and endings, were peripheral compared to describing character, the details of location, moods, dialogues, particularities. To be able to write also was a sign of having reached mature manhood. The pen that is mightier than the sword was made of pure, masculine imagination. Even by writing unpublishable stuff, I felt that I was fighting the Nazis. Besides, that one should walk before one flies is an important lesson to learn.

The harder the material, the more I enjoyed trying to solve the problems. The only depressing thing was reading the work of my friends. One never could be one hundred percent sure that one had done one's best, if one saw how much better others handled the language. Within my small circle, writing was competition: we'd let others look at our work and allow them their opinion, not always a wise thing. Depending on the mood, even your best and maybe your only friend would hunch his shoulders and say, "I'm not sure," or worse, "What did you intend to say with this?" Real progress depended on harsh self-criticism, on using intelligently the author's automatic, built-in "shit detector," to quote Ernest Hemingway. On the other hand, a sharp-witted critic, though he may not be able to teach you how to write, may teach you not to take yourself too seriously. Of course, praise put me in the best mood of all. I preferred it, because then I could dismiss it with a wave of the hand.

What I saw around me was a wounded people shouting their hearts out in agony, while a choir of thunderous voices yelled, swore, bellowed, barked, and snarled at them. And cursed them to death. Long before it rained bullets and bombs, I heard an orchestra of exploding anger and agony – in German, the only language I knew by heart! I wished I had been born to a language less cruel, less mean, less sentimental, less pompous, less bitter and biting. I wished I had been born in London or Paris or Rome or anywhere else in the world. Because I was born in Vienna, my masters were Heine and Tucholsky, Morgenstern and Fallada, Zweig and Wasserman, Kafka and Brod. Of Russian and Yiddish authors in German translation, my favorites, romantic and melodious, were Gorky and Gogol, Sholem Aleichem and Yizchak Lab Perez. This was the kind of German I was about to learn but, alas, it was too late. We saw the book-burning in the Berlin streets on newsreels, carried out with the vulgarity of drunken crowds at the fair. German? Learn to forget it, just like the city and its empty fleshpots. One choir humming, howling, crying *oy veh iz mir*, and another yelling *Sieg Heil*. Let me out of here!

Between the ages of twelve and sixteen, it's time to think about what to do with one's life. Our chances of surviving the war seemed at

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best fifty-fifty, which I translated to mean half my life might already be over, and all I would have done with it was to waste my gift on a dead language, dead because all the people who spoke and read it would soon be dead. What a waste of time to try so hard to learn a dying tongue, a lesson that came to me along with another one. Not poets but politicians dictate the uses of language; it is governments that have the power to outlaw words and sentences and to burn down entire libraries. Then what happens? Language also changes and dictates politics, as the English language did in postwar Western Europe and now in Eastern Europe. What we all needed was a language one could reasonably love and enjoy. How much I hated to love German.

In December of 1938, we children left Vienna on one of those now legendary children's refugee trains that rescued children from Germany and Austria, bringing them to safety in England and Holland, although a mere eighteen months later, Holland would be unsafe, too. We soon learned to speak Dutch and went to school.

No one could accuse the Western democracies of anti-Semitism, of not caring a damn for the Jews. In the autumn of 1939, the foreign ministers of most Western countries, including Australia, Canada, South Africa, and the United States, as well as some from South America, met in Evian on Lake Geneva, to discuss the Jewish problem. There are many long apologies and explanations of why immigration quotas have to be low: a few thousand here, a few thousand there, and even those are a burden on an economy recoiling from a decade of depression. Of course, this was a lie, as the depression was over. There was a war on or one about to begin. There was plenty of work. War, cold or hot, as we know, is the cure-all for unemployment. There was no depression, but there was an obsession with the magic powers of the Jews. To transplant all of Europe's Jews to lands where they would feel safe might solve our problem and the problem of conscience for now, but what about the future? As the Australian delegate put it, we have no anti-Semitism in Australia because we have few Jews, but having a lot of Jews produces anti-Semitism, and we don't want to have too many anti-Semites in our country; hence, it's better to restrict Jewish immigration to a minimum.

To the government in Berlin and its leaders, the message from Evian was clear: We can't help the Jews; may God help them. A virtual sentence of death was pronounced over an entire people and would soon be carried out. As it does today, the world looked to America to set an example in opening its gates wider. It just didn't happen. It should have, but it didn't, whether in collusion with American Jewish leaders or not.

After Evian, the preparations for the burnt offering, now fashionably called the Holocaust, began in earnest when the Germans attacked Warsaw after Ribbentrop and Molotov had decided to cut up Poland, after

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England and France officially had declared war on Germany. Now the trapdoors were let down, all borders were closed. The Jews had no escape. The German press was jubilant. No exit. There were a handful of exceptions to prove the rule. Last-minute negotiations might have redeemed the hostages, even at this late hour, but there were other serious considerations to be taken into account. The infernal circle was now completed by a logic hard to refute. The devil's own mind was at work when Hitler and his followers came up with their version of the "final solution" to the Jewish problem, as they called it. They counted on one overwhelming logical argument: Should the West come up with the ransom, the Germans could always ask for more. Any substantial transfer of gold or raw materials would strengthen the German war machine. So, bailing out the Jews also would help Hitler. Supporting the enemy with raw material and tons of gold would cause public outrage, and to save the Jews at a price that had no ceiling would be an act of self-defeat. Whatever sarcasm one can use today, one must recognize the validity this argument had then. Ultimately, should anything happen to the Jews, the German enemy and not the rest of the world would be guilty. What was wrong with putting the mark of Cain on the much-hated Germans? After all, they had chosen their leader in a democratic election. One went to war in order to save humanity and humanism, not merely to save Jews and Gypsies. This logic, however, doesn't kill. Humanism, especially in its European, Western, Christian tradition, is hardly suicidal but alive and well everywhere.

But let me not end on a note of despair. History is not likely to repeat itself. Considering the possibilities of the future, we are all doing very well.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you. The next speaker is Slavenka Drakulic.

Slavenka Drakulic: I feel that I have to apologize to you, because I didn't prepare a paper. I always was a bad pupil and hated to go to school, and I always liked to improvise. Yet the fact that I hated to go to school and in general didn't like to do what people asked me to do, even on this occasion, is not really why I didn't prepare a paper but made just brief notes. It is because a war is going on in my country. And when you live in a country that is at war, you cannot get away from it. It doesn't leave you alone. It means that you write about it, you talk about it, you think about it, you dream about it. It is always inside you, even when you go very far away and stay away for a long time. There is no way to get out of the war. That is why I figured I could speak of any aspect of that war off the top of my head.

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I am very grateful to Dubravka Ugresic, who spoke yesterday of the emotional side of the war. This relieved me of that burden, and I know that I could not possibly do it better than she did. On the other hand, I am also so very grateful to Mr. Enzensberger, who actually spoke on the topic I wanted to address. If there are any titles that could be given to my remarks, they would be, "Intellectuals as Bad Guys" and "The Relationship between Intellectuals and War." I want to speak about intellectuals as bad guys because, in the first place, we have been fixed here on the positive role of intellectuals and writers, assuming that they should be or that they are on the positive side, the side of the truth – as if we know what the truth is. As if we didn't learn or witness enormous distortions of the truth, of "theories," or simply of "illusions." After all, many people speaking here have played a large role in influencing recent history.

I would like to add some observations to this discussion, but I am aware of the fact that even self-criticism adds to self-importance. So let us not forget to ask: Who are we? Who may we be? I am actually referring to the two-sided identity of the intellectual.

Many have spoken of the fact that very soon the writers and intellectuals in Eastern Europe will be in the same position as writers in America. They will be free of their historical burden to be conscious of the people. That is, they will be free to speak the truth, to say whatever they please, but they will be irrelevant and marginal to society in general and swallowed by the consumer society. I think that just like people in America, the people in Eastern Europe will learn to get and to expect everything, as Brodsky said, "good and bad, more bad than good." We have expected intellectuals to speak up in our name, to represent us, to shape the important ideas for us. This implies a certain laziness of the mind. And I suspect that the free-market economy will sooner or later force us to understand the meaning of individualism. In turn, that will create the possibility for us to finally think freely, simply because we now do not know how to think freely or independently. No one, and nothing in our lives, has taught us that difficult skill. In a sense we are quite innocent.

This, I believe, is the reason to believe that in the transition from Communism to democracy the intelligentsia will still play an important role. It is even more important considering that we don't know how long this period of so-called transition will last and that we don't have any guarantees that the present path really will lead to democracy. I have to add another reason to remind ourselves of our human possibilities, that is, our weaknesses. It arises from the fact that I do not believe that the masses alone determine the course of history or take history into their hands. Not only am I terrified of this idea, but I also must say that this is

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simply not true, at least in my country. If I may use a metaphor here, ideas are matches that started the fire of war. And we all know who produces ideas. Those ideas were produced by intellectuals. Of course, it could be argued that ideas depend upon political, historical, and social conditions, but I see them as the embodied power of ideas. I base my observations on what I have witnessed and experienced and suffered, because of the ideas in my country.

In fact, I come from two countries. One is Yugoslavia, the country torn apart by bloody and merciless war. The other is the country that has suffered the most in that war, Croatia. Of course, I could go on to speak of how I feel about this double identity, of spending one half of a life in one country and the other half in a different country. But that would be a different subject, which I could speak of later, if you wish.

Jakov mentioned something that is a key to what I am going to say: "We all knew it was coming." How did we know that it was coming, and for how long did we know it? "It" is the word I hate, war. You may not realize that it is the intellectuals, writers, and journalists who were the real avant-garde of the war. The world was surprised when the war broke out, but we were not surprised. We only imagined that the madness could be stopped, that some people, or some God, would step in and do something. Do what? After all those years of building up hatred, what possibly could have been done? The gods gave up, it is clear, and we were in hell. I remember when it started, when Slovenian and Serbian writers began writing open letters to each other in the mid-eighties. They were very candid yet civilized, sometimes very thoughtful, letters, about national literature as education. But the topic was approached very carefully. Years before Milosevic came to power, Slovenian and Serbian writers alike complained that the educational programs included too many of the writers of other nationalities and republics. The question was, of course, how much from Slovenian and from Serbian literature should be included in the national curriculum.

At the same time it was blasphemous to speak of nationalism. Serbian colleagues accused their Slovenian counterparts of chauvinism; nationalism later became the more derogatory accusation. At that point, sides had already been drawn. The atmosphere was heating up. The Yugoslav Writers Association, which later, as you can imagine, fell apart, held meetings. It was the beginning of the long way down to the bottom of the war. I am not saying that the writers caused the war or started it. I am saying that national homogenization, basically the cause of the war, began then and there, on the intellectual and cultural level. I have not even mentioned the declining economic conditions and the other social problems the country faced. Here, I am speaking of ideas. I am saying that the ideas about dividing the educational, literary territory, the ter-

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ritory of writers, started there, and there the idea of division has stayed ever since.

There followed the division of the space within which the media functioned. It became increasingly dangerous. The case of television is interesting and symbolic of the situation in general. First we had one television network. And then every republic began to build its own studio, producing its own programs. At first, the new networks were shared among the republics, so we actually knew what was happening in other parts of our country. Then, the media split and the television audiences in each republic didn't have the faintest clue as to what the people were watching in the other republics. At that time, we also had Skymuse and CNN, so we knew what was happening in the United States, in New Zealand, and so on, but we still didn't know what was happening in a neighboring republic. This isolation was engineered on purpose, for propaganda; the less information, the more propaganda. When we were reduced to watching television, radio and newspapers too were reduced to means of propaganda. That was when the basis of our common living, of understanding was slowly taken away from us. We no longer had any way of understanding each other.

The next step, the political manipulation through the media, was easy. At the same time, journalists loved deluding themselves with the idea that at least they had some kind of freedom. Since I am a journalist, I have to say that yes, we did have some freedom, but I know that the freedom of the press ended at national borders. You could freely write and criticize whatever you wanted to about the Communist leadership in the other republics. But you were not supposed to do that about your own government or about the Communist Party in your own republic. When Milosevic came into power, he did a very simple thing: he replaced all the key persons in the media. Then the center of power was in his camp; he was deliberating with his own people. It was a very old Bolshevik maneuver. And then the big game of openly blaming others, whoever they might be, could start. Of course, the name for it was nationalism. Perhaps that doesn't sound dangerous to you. But consider that this was a process which many faithful totalitarian minds had prepared for over six or seven years. They worked to legitimize national hatred. And they succeeded. If it doesn't sound dangerous enough, it certainly became dangerous, when Serbian writers and academics seriously embarked on outlining the blueprint for the new state, the greater Serbia. They came up with what is now the famous documented memorandum, the secret document that became available only later. This proves how dangerous it is when writers take themselves too seriously, and when others take them too seriously. It does not always lead to catastrophe, but in our case it certainly did.

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I have given just the bare bones of the beginning of the war. There are many more details, many names, much more to say, and many questions. But I wanted to give you the gist of the role played by intellectuals – the "bad guys" in the war. I don't pretend that this is the entire explanation; it's much more complex. But I want to repeat that the idea of the moral superiority of intellectuals is a dangerous one. After all, and in spite of what we are and what we hope for, which is immortality, we are only humans. Remember that even since 1989, in the so-called emerging new democracies, writers have not been an innocent breed. I will quote the words of the one of the most distinguished, widely translated, and most popular Serbian writer, from his recent interview in the American press: "Democracy is smoke from a cunt," he said. "What?" asked a shocked reporter, trying to grasp the meaning of this literal translation of an expression in our language used to dismiss something as being totally unworthy. "Yes," answered the famous Serbian writer, "I think democracy is smoke from the female organ."

Even if we are to become very marginal in the next decade of so, let us not follow in the direction his opinion has taken.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you, Slavenka. Ivan Klima will speak next, and then we will have discussion.

Ivan Klima: Before I begin, I should like to mention two questions I am often asked. People have wondered how I managed to survive in my childhood being in a concentration camp, or how I was able to survive as a writer during all these years of oppression. I always answered that for a writer the worst experiences are interesting and useful, provided he does survive them. I was lucky once more when, after I arrived at Kennedy Airport the other evening for this conference, within fifteen minutes my bag was stolen. In it was not only most of my money, but the paper I had prepared for the conference. So I arrived in Newark at 2:00 A. M. without my paper. I was lucky enough to survive this experience, and I succeeded in reconstructing my paper, with the help of Professor Thomas.

The other question I have been asked is, "What is life like in a country ruled by intellectuals, whose president is a dramatist?" At first, I gave evasive answers: other countries are also ruled by intellectuals; Havel is an excellent writer and also a gifted politician. But later I began to think of what lay behind these questions. Were they motivated by interest, envy, or distrust? To answer the question completely, we must go back and analyze the situation of the opposition in the Eastern bloc as a whole. Because I know you are informed about the situation in Poland, Romania, and elsewhere, I will stress the situation in Czechoslovakia,

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which is a little different from the others. For the most part, the relatively stable economy and the politics of the Communist Party corrupted the working class and discouraged its members from engaging in political struggle. Thus, most of the opposition came from the humanist intelligentsia, which was persecuted more than any other group. The cultural tradition in Czechoslovakia has had a long history, and I can say it was the humanist intelligentsia in particular which took responsibility for the sustaining the faith of the country in the most crucial moments of its history. Although a few workers were members of the main opposition group, Charter 77, it mainly consisted of members of the intelligentsia, writers, priests, educated humanists, and last but not least, many former members of the reformist wing of the Communist Party which had been purged following the Soviet occupation. The intellectual capacity of the Charter 77 movement was therefore considerable, even though in numbers it did not exceed a thousand members. During its lifetime, Charter 77 published more than two hundred documents which touched on almost all the fundamental programs of the ailing society. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the isolation of this group, the fact that it was consciously kept apart from all social structures with the exception of the police, created a closed society and a ghetto mentality rich in original thought and dizzy ideas, but distinctly lacking in a sense of reality.

Thanks to many Western media sources, such as Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and the BBC, the activities of the small Charter 77 organization became familiar to the broad mass of the Czech and Slovak population. Ironically, this persecuted and silenced group increasingly came to be regarded as the voice of the nation. The silent majority, that made up ninety-nine percent, regularly voted and quietly tolerated the regime, but nevertheless despised it and yearned for its demise. They felt that Charter 77 expressed their disagreement with totalitarianism, their hidden desires, their suppressed protests against injustice and lack of freedom. They believed that Charter 77 articulated their critical opinions about the declining economy, the desperate state of the environment, education, and health care. Vaclav Havel, as the most significant, capable, and most persecuted member of this group, became a true national hero. Along with many of his closest friends, when the crucial moment for the ruling system finally came, Havel and the representatives from the small opposition group were able to establish very quickly a widely supported revolutionary staff. After a few days, they appointed delegates for the first talks with the representatives of power. The opposition leaders became the leaders of the nation overnight.

Ironically, the same people who so recently had not been allowed to address even the smallest group of citizens now addressed thousands of

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those who only a few days before had been afraid to pronounce Havel's name aloud. They chanted, "Havel to the Castle!" It is undoubtedly to the credit of this humanist opposition that the revolution took place without violence and that it earned the symbolic title, the Velvet Revolution. The majority of the population took it for granted that the opposition representatives were destined to form a new government and would guarantee the redress of the country's affairs, since they were morally uncompromised.

Now we come to the crucial problems of the whole opposition, namely its small number of participants and its previous isolation from government. I ask you for a moment to put yourself in their shoes. Up to this point, all the leading positions in the society had been occupied by the so-called members of the Communist nomenclature. At one fell swoop, one had to replace, as soon as possible, the ministers and their deputies, the managers of departments, the rectors and deans of universities and part of the faculties, the judges, the prosecutors, the radio and television controllers, the most compromised editors, most of the police and officer class, ambassadors and the greater part of the diplomatic corps, formed, as you surely know, mostly from the secret police. In short, tens of thousands of people needed to be replaced, even though there was no new political party at disposal. There wasn't even a survey of the people who up to that point had worked in the government spheres. There were only a very limited number of members of the Charter organization and their friends, among whom most were intellectuals and artists, many of whom refused to accept any kind of position in the new government. There were also at the disposal of the opposition several hundred thousand people who had been persecuted by the former regime. True democrats at the beginning of the 1950s were sentenced to imprisonment, but most of them were now sixty or seventy years old. The majority of the remaining persecuted individuals were former members of the reformist wing of the Communist Party purged in the 1970s. Furthermore, it could rightly be assumed that all these groups were infiltrated by the omnipresent agents of the secret police. Many of these agents would even enter the new parliament. When exposed, they refused to resign, so contributing to the fact that the representatives of the opposition were beginning to lose their greatest quality, their moral purity.

To make the situation even more complicated, the representatives of the opposition wanted to renew democracy by refraining from purges, to maintain under all circumstances the rule of law. At the same time, they were faced with tasks beyond all human strength, for they had inherited a wholly bankrupt state, an economy that didn't function, the worst ecological conditions in Europe, neglected health care and educa-

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tion systems, disintegrating housing, and a populace whose morale had been destroyed by fifty years of totalitarian systems. They had inherited a state that resembled a ruined house, whose walls were in such a dilapidated condition that the moment one touched them, they crumbled. In the midst of all this, the opposition's task was to completely transform the economic system, to replace a utopia that didn't work with a market economy that would, and all this had to be done at a time of pervasive economic recession. To accomplish all this would require thousands of the best specialists, which they didn't have. Even if they had, they didn't have the money to pay them, because the treasury was empty. The principal disadvantage of the opposition, therefore, was not its intellectualism, but rather its lack of numbers, its blameless severance from the real problems of power, and its absolute inexperience in government affairs. The principal advantage of the opposition, at least in its first key moments, was the moral integrity and the trust it engendered in the people.

The trust of the Czechoslovakian public was so considerable that in the free election, the oppositional Civic Forum gained more than sixty percent of the vote. However, the revolutionary mood couldn't last forever. People usually associate a host of unrealizable ideas with revolution. They assume that the moment a hated and ineffective regime falls, things will be miraculously transformed. They assume that it is enough for a good and hopeful program to exist, and that capable and uncompromised people will be there to lead the nation. People believe that happiness will replace misery as quickly as freedom replaces the absence of freedom. Unfortunately, these expectations are illusory. It is much easier to cut through the wires of borders than to change a defunct economic position into a prospering one. The founder of the Czech Republic, President Tomas Masaryk, observed the same post-revolutionary perils in his time, when, in his words, "Disenchantment quickly follows enormous enthusiasm and people find guilty everyone but themselves, just as they used to in the past."

Only one real solution has presented itself during the situation I have attempted to outline: compromise, which involves replacing as far as possible and as quickly as possible the people at the top and cooperating with others. There is no doubt that this decision has created many complications. The representatives of the former regime, after the initial shock, quickly recognized that the democrats didn't intend to progress in the same way as the previous regime had. They quickly attempted to manipulate their new bosses and to maintain their former influence by, among other things, attempting to prove their indispensability and their credentials, doubtful in any case since their qualifications were linked with a completely different regime. On the whole, these representatives

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of the former regime flattered their new bosses but at the same time despised them because of their lack of experience. Moral purity was a virtue that meant nothing to these people, because they had been for years used to ignoring it.

The public observed these developments with growing mistrust. We shouldn't forget that forty years of the Communist system, however much it was hated, left indelible marks on the people's thoughts and feelings. The former regime had taught people class hatred, encouraged envy and deviousness. It feared all advanced ideas, and not for nothing did it persecute the churches and the faithful. Reared in this kind of atmosphere, the people instinctively expected similar treatment from the new system of government, whose magnanimity was simply incomprehensible. Being asked by the new regime to respect the law, which for forty years had meant nothing but destructiveness, seemed both naive and dangerous to people. More and more frequently there was heard talk about a "Communist mafia" that had skillfully assumed a new guise and would once more govern society. One must admit that in many cases, this talk was justified. Former representatives of the Communist regime exploited their positions and their fortune, quickly converted to capitalism, and all of a sudden former Communist bosses were reborn in the capacity of owners of companies.

A year ago, an unbelievable pamphlet was concocted and widely distributed. The authors of this document were quite openly members of the former secret police, although one former political prisoner had signed it. The pamphlet blamed the former opposition, in particular the adherents of Charter 77, for all sorts of imaginary crimes, for collaboration with secret organizations from the Freemasons to the KGB, the CIA, and the Mossad. The author of the pamphlet, albeit unmasked as a former police agent, recently organized an extensive lecture tour in Slovakia. More and more, one hears criticism of those who for twenty years took part in the opposition, although they had previously been members of the Communist Party.

A few years ago, an interesting sociological study was published in Czechoslovakia. Its author, Ivo Mozny, attempted to explain the relationship of the ordinary citizen to the dissidents, that is, to the representatives of the opposition. In his opinion, the ordinary citizen noticed the dissidents' status of exclusivity, however much he may have admired their courage. To the man in the street, the dissidents had access to cultural assets unavailable to ordinary people. For this reason, the ordinary individual instinctively ranked the dissidents among the ruling class and, considering his experiences of the Communist ruling class, it is no wonder that he is reluctant to get involved in politics. Moreover, the contacts enjoyed by the dissidents are perceived as being inaccessible to ordinary

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people. Ordinary people can obtain only inferior material goods, and even those at considerable risks, whereas dissidents are seen as enjoying contacts with Bratislava, as well as with London, New York, and Uppsala. For all these reasons, Mozny's study argues that the man in the street is convinced that it is better not to get involved with "the bosses," so to speak. Although this argument may seem simplistic, it reveals typical characteristics of those whose relationship with a Communist regime has been purely passive.

These obstacles aside, the members of the opposition have attained an extraordinary degree of success in a short space of time. Immediately following the revolution, fundamental civic rights were restored; censorship was completely abolished; the right to congregate was renewed, including the establishment of political parties; and a deadline for free elections was announced. In the course of a few days, the border fences that had turned the whole country into a concentration camp were pulled down. When the minister of foreign affairs, one of the leading dissidents and representatives of Charter 77, took part in this almost symbolic act, he didn't do it to pose in front of the television cameras but because it signified the fulfillment of what he and his friends had long since struggled for.

In the course of several weeks, negotiations were initiated with the Soviet authorities for the removal of foreign troops and successfully concluded. Economic reforms were drawn up, involving a radical transition from one system to another – for which there were no parallels or models for the new government to rely on. In the midst of all the problems reform brought, inflation was kept within reasonable limits and a decent standard of living was maintained. I consider one of the greatest successes of this period to be the preservation of legal rights and the prevention of revanchism or even trials. The representatives of the new government established the basis of a just, legal state. At the same time, they undoubtedly allowed former Communists to keep their positions. In so doing, they inevitably lost a certain level of popularity.

I know many people, of whom a number are friends, who overnight ceased to be dissidents and became representatives of the authorities. I do not feel called upon, however, to judge any of them personally. Many of them have exhibited outstanding talents and have mastered difficult tasks with surprising skill. Others needed at least a little time to gain experience, but unfortunately, years of apprenticeship simply were not available. There is no doubt that the government's popularity, celebrated when in opposition, is on the decline. We could downplay this situation by claiming that any government in power during difficult times, when unemployment is on the rise and the standard of living is falling, automatically loses popularity. Yet I am convinced that there is a more compli-

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cated process at work here, that the new sympathies and antipathies are rooted deeply in the subconscious of our society. During the time of oppression, the opposition became the voice of the people. The silent majority were relieved and encouraged that someone was expressing their sentiments, even at the cost of risks they themselves were not willing to take. Now times have changed. Today, everyone can express his opinion, and the until recently silent majority no longer needs its brave spokesmen. There is no doubt that the stage we are now entering is a difficult one. Unemployment will increase. Along with it will disappear even that wretched feeling of security passed on by the old Communist regime. When times are difficult, people demand charismatic leaders, a person they can trust. This is certainly one reason why President Havel continues to enjoy widespread popularity. On the other hand, most people understand very well that the difficulties our society faces are a consequence of the legacy bequeathed by the former Communist regime – a regime in which everyone participated passively, apart from a handful who found enough courage to refrain from voting and to oppose those in power at the risk of imprisonment. This handful of people is a living reminder of the guilt that those who remained passive feel. But the majority of people won't tolerate living for long with such uncomfortable feelings of guilt.

I am loath to play the part of a prophet, but I would say that by the time the next elections have taken place in a few months, far-reaching changes will occur in the Czech political scene. Several of those who represented the recent opposition will be replaced by new politicians whose attitudes have been closer to the conduct of the majority of people. I am not against these changes taking place. This is the basic difference between total revolution and democratic revolution. The leaders of total revolution are prepared to sacrifice everyone and everything simply to preserve their own power. To the general detriment of the population, they demand the constant allegiance of the crowd. When they leave power, they leave only ruin in their wake. The leaders of a democratic revolution, in contrast, are prepared to sacrifice themselves to preserve democratic goals, efforts which are all too often greeted by jeers from the people. However, when these leaders relinquish power, they do so to other leaders who will continue the work of democratic reform. From this point of view, credit is due to the intelligentsia for establishing a lawful state and a democratic system of government. The value of the goals of the task it has provisionally undertaken, almost against its will, is inestimable.

Edith Kurzweil: Our participants have agreed to forego discussion among themselves, since time is getting short, and we want to turn over

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the discussion to the audience. Please be brief in your comments, to give the largest possible number of people a chance to speak.

Question: I have a question for Doris Lessing. At the beginning of your talk, you spoke about the use of language, the political implications of controlling it. Do you think we can learn from the experiences of Eastern Europeans and from South Americans who lived through dictatorships – many of whom have remarked that Westerners, especially Americans, are very naive about our government, whether we are criticizing or just dissenting. What can we learn in order to become more critical?

Doris Lessing: I personally have learned a lot in the last two days, listening to people who have in fact gone through this kind of experience. Some of the language they used was very careful, I think, and nonrhetorical. One could certainly learn from that. Are you asking perhaps how we could change our attitudes of mind about power?

Question: I guess I am asking about how to wake up the general public. It appeared to me, in talking with people who have lived through very different types of dictatorships, that virtually none of them took their government's word at face value, whereas in the United States, it is exactly the opposite. Almost everyone here takes what the government says at face value, and there are only a few who are critical or even question it.

Doris Lessing: I think that it is felt not only by people from Eastern and Central Europe. In Western Europe, too, Americans are regarded as being too uncritical of their rulers. Possibly it is because we in Western Europe are on the whole rather skeptical. We're cynical; we don't really believe what we are told, except, of course, at election times, when everyone gets a bit feverish. Why is it that Americans, every time they have a new president, expect everything from this person – who is inheriting exactly the same situation his predecessor faced? Realistically, not much can change, you know. But every time they elect a new president, Americans talk as if a new age is about to begin. I have absolutely no idea why they do this!

Question: Mr. Lind, you are sitting between Doris Lessing and Slavenka Drakulic, who have very consistently sounded two notes heard throughout this conference – notes that are not incompatible but different. On the one hand, we have a bid for the freedom of artists from the political and social commitment that surrounds them and the observation that this

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can have crippling effects. Anything from political correctness to socialist realism can engender only garbage and nonsense. On the other hand, we have the sense that in this dangerous world hatred flows, and intellectuals cannot avoid some kind of social responsibility. You have lived all of your life as an intellectual, and in areas where hatred and animosity have not been exactly strangers. How would you comment on the question of the social and political responsibility of the artist?

Jakov Lind: I'm not sure that I have lived all my life as an intellectual. I wasn't born to be an intellectual; I was born, if anything, to write. I am not sure this is the same thing. I don't think a writer necessarily is an intellectual. I don't feel I have to take responsibility for intellectuals, but I often find myself in their company, because we have a common language. Whether I am responsible for what goes on in society depends on me as a person, not on me as an intellectual or a writer. Many people who are not writers or intellectuals feel responsible for their society, as I saw in Holland during the war, where the butcher, the baker, and anyone else could become great heroes in the underground. They led with more intelligence than some intellectuals could have done. The relevance of the intellectuals as the revolutionary came up here, at this conference, because of what happened in Eastern Europe. There, intellectuals took the lead, probably because the others couldn't. But you can't identify intellectuals as being more responsible than other citizens. People who write can do certain things. They can clarify certain issues that concern all of us, not only the politics of the day, but the politics of existence. I feel a responsibility yet an awareness of my own shortcomings. Can I express myself? Do I have a view to express? Do I know how to express it correctly? I don't think I have to change any governments. It doesn't matter to me personally whether Mr. Bush or Mr. Clinton is in power, but I don't know if that is true for the country as a whole. I am speaking from my own personal and private interests.

Question: I wonder if Mr. Klima or any other member of the panel would have something to say about the moral dimensions of the dilemma of where those implicated in the old regime should fit into the new society. I am referring to the Czech law of lustration, but it is not a problem for the Czechs alone. So many were implicated in the old regimes and coopted. What are we now to do? Can we write them all off, or should we hold them to some kind of moral accountability?

Ivan Klima: This is a complicated problem. The new leaders now are under persistent pressure from below to exert some kind of revenge. How is it possible to remove all of those in the former regime from

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power or their function? We are speaking of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people, who were connected with the old regime. It is nearly impossible. To address this problem, our parliament has put into effect some laws that are controversial but not really severe: some people who had high-level Party functions or were members of the militia are not allowed to have leading positions for five years. This was a compromise between legality and the pressures from below. I opposed this law, but it was accepted. I guess it is just on the brink of acceptability, given the difficult period we live in.

Question: This is directed to Doris Lessing. Political romanticism inflated the values of the Soviet systems and disparaged those of the West. It seems to me this arose out of a sort of bad conscience. Do you agree? How do you explain it?

Doris Lessing: Do you mean bad conscience in the West or my bad conscience?

Question: The inflation of the values of Communism by Western intellectuals, which you spoke of, and the disparagement of their own values and those of their own cultures, came out of a bad conscience of some sort. Do you agree?

Doris Lessing: I think that for some reason or other – historians would be able to explain why – in the West there has been an expectation of some kind of ideal, or perfect, or much better society than we've got. I don't know where this has come from, and I've spent a lot of time thinking about it recently. Why are we so terribly dissatisfied with a kind of society that, however imperfect, is actually pretty good for most of its citizens? Where does this dissatisfaction come from? Sometimes it arises from contempt and loathing for the countries we live in. Until recently people here thought that the grass was greener in the Communist countries, or if it wasn't greener, then it was going to be. This was all rooted in a dislike of what we've got. I have no idea where it comes from. It certainly leads to extraordinary paradoxes. Young people in Britain, for instance, go out from fairly privileged positions to work in third world countries because they are Communists. I'm talking about Zimbabwe. They find the most appalling conditions, and their hearts break. They see yet again that paradise does not exist. But why people expect it to exist, is the point.

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Question: Within the new structures of the smaller Eastern European countries, or even in Russia, what role do you predict Jewish citizens will play? Are there any real dangers for Jews in these economies and new social structures?

Ivan Klima: There really are no Jews in that part of the world, with the exception of Russia.

Question: This question is for Doris Lessing and Slavenka Drakulic. There has been a notion among feminist intellectuals in this country that there is or should be some distinctly female sensibility or female ethic that women writers should express. I wonder if you think there is something inherently oppressive and dogmatic about that notion.

Doris Lessing: Is the female sex in some way superior? No, I don't agree with that. I think there is nothing observable historically to support the supposition that women are in some way more peace-loving, gentler, and so on, than men. This is an enormous subject, but I don't agree with this view. I think, like other idealistic and romantic notions, it is damaging to women.

Question: I would like to ask something of Slavenka Drakulic or Ivan Klima. I am Polish and was raised under the Communist regime and propaganda in Poland. Recently, I traveled to Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. I found there that the common people were afraid to talk about the occurring changes. It was like the beginning of the 1980s, when I asked people in Yugoslavia about Tito and they told me he was a great guy, just like a father to them. Yet we knew he was a dictator like Stalin. Was the kind of response I found due to the strength of propaganda or to people's fears?

Ivan Klima: I would like to add that after the Soviet invasion, most of the intellectuals who were Communists were removed. They were on such a low and stupid level that no one believed them. On the other hand, people were asking for all sorts of books that had been forbidden.

Edith Kurzweil: One last question.

Question: In the final analysis, it seems to me, the opposition of the intellectuals to Communism was not so much opposition to Communism as it was a reflection of the instinctive determination of the individual to remain alive as an individual. Secondly, I am interested to know how

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Eastern European intellectuals view Gorbachev's role in this process, as a liberator or as the last leader of a defunct ideology.

Ivan Klima: It is such a complicated question that I hope we will have another two- or three-day conference devoted to Gorbachev, so that we could answer you.

Edith Kurzweil: Thank you very much, and thank you for your patience. Our thanks go also to our participants, some of whom, I am sure, will answer additional questions more informally, now that our formal conference is ended.

Coming in
Partisan Review:

- Richard Pipes on Intellectuals and Anti-Americanism
- Robert Wistrich on *Fin-de-Siècle* Vienna
- Peter Shaw on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*
- Dorothea Straus on Jerzy Kosinski
- William Phillips on Middlebrow Culture
- C. Vann Woodward on the University
- Anatole Broyard: *A Memoir*
- Pearl K. Bell: *Fiction Chronicle*
- Leonard Kriegel: *Gender and Its Discontents*
- Karen Wilkin: *At the Galleries*

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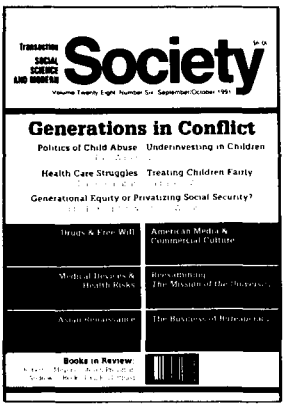
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